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# A World History of Art

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*Sheldon Cheney Is Author of*

THE STORY OF MODERN ART

A PRIMER OF MODERN ART

THE NEW WORLD ARCHITECTURE

EXPRESSIONISM IN ART

ART AND THE MACHINE

*(with Martha Candler Cheney)*

STAGE DECORATION

THE THEATRE: 3000 YEARS OF DRAMA,  
ACTING AND STAGECRAFT

*And Other Books*

A WORLD  
HISTORY  
OF  
ART

BY  
SHELDON  
CHENEY

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#### NOTE ON ILLUSTRATIONS

The list of illustrations usually placed at this point is omitted because a serial list would be useless for reference where so many titles are included—in this case 480 separate pictures. Instead the titles and artists are listed in the Index at the end of the book italic figures preceded by the letters III being employed for illustrations (e.g., III 497) to distinguish them from text entries which are in Roman figures (e.g., 497).

## Preface

THROUGHOUT the writing of this book I have tried to keep in mind the man who has heard hopefully that art is important and rewarding, who wants a personal approach to it. I have pictured the average student or adult reader as desiring not so much facts as an introduction to the *experience* of art. As one might arise some morning saying "I should like to feel the grandeur of El Greco, of Michelangelo, be immersed in the unearthly loveliness of a Sung landscape or a Sienese gold-and-rose Madonna. Why don't the books tell me the things that will split the prison of my mind and open my faculties to that transcending experience?"

Art is joyous, if one can get at it. But there is a mistrust abroad that the joy of it and the ways into that joy are obscured by commentators, and particularly by the historians.

The picture or statue carries its own justification. It bestows its own blessing. It is in itself the way into communion and contentment. But the chroniclers have surrounded it with a cemetery of dates and data, of whys and wherefores, have hidden it in a maze of disputed doctrines and explications. The reader too seldom is led to feel it as the quintessence of its own time, too seldom experiences the distilled beauty of it, savouring its singularity and fragrance. What commentaries exist are concerned rather with exterior things, with styles and sources, with intellectual and literary meanings, with schematic rankings, or sometimes with gossip and anecdote and legend.

It may be possible, I thought, to offer an approach more direct, less through mental knowledge, more illuminated by the guide's feeling, definitely planned to lead into experience. This should be, if successful, history as introduction and stimulus, not history as annotation and classification.

In implying that there are no art histories of that sort, I am not condemning or depreciating the existing manuals and treatises. The shelves of analytical works have been excellent for their informative purpose, setting "master-

pieces" in a convenient row, affording guidance through the lists of names and dates and styles. They were admirably designed as handbooks to the Victorian intellectual study of art, and are doubtless admirable still for the uses of many teachers. It is, however, precisely because the intellectual approach is increasingly distrusted, and the direct meeting with art more valued, that a history on a different plan seems called for.

In effect my text deals far less than usual with the end-products of art through the ages, is less filled with descriptions of the masterpieces. The sequence of material "works"—buildings, paintings, statues, vases, prints—and the chronological ordering of information about artists, peoples, and beliefs, afford a still convenient web upon which to embroider the larger composition. But it seems that the design itself should emerge in a related structure, as an organism, wherein the tides of man's art consciousness and art creativeness are patterned forth inseparably.

There is a perilous gap between seeing that this other sort of art history is needed, and setting down a report so contrary to every precedent and model. The greatest difficulty is perhaps the first to begin resolutely by emphasizing the sense of a basic unity, by looking forward at every moment to the integration. It is necessary then to cast aside countless compiled records of products, particularly the archaeologist's cherished lists of "finds" in this tomb or that Pompeii, and to skim over a great many reputations that have been accorded impressive space in earlier histories. As for dates, if one must yield a little before the schoolhouse passion for figures one may, discreetly, add a catch-all for them at the end, in an appendix. Disburdened of such impedimenta, one is free to show forth as simply as one's abilities permit, the unity and continuity of artistic expression, through man's unceasing if disjointed tenancy of the civilized world.

In regard to the matter of unity, and the too usual lack of it in written records, the fact is pertinent that few histories in our language treat the Far Eastern accomplishment as a connected and interrelated part of the world's art-story. In existing books, if the transcending achievement of Chinese painters and sculptors is not disregarded as if non-existent, it is too often reserved for a frankly extra chapter or appendix. This would seem to be both misleading and unfair to the trusting student. It may be interpreted too as a disquieting survival of Western intellectual arrogance.

It is futile to believe that the West can achieve full aesthetic appreciation, or for that matter the deepest creative release, so long as it continues to ignore

the theory and results of art practice among races comprising one-third of civilized mankind, and they the older in wisdom and the more accustomed to artistic splendour. It is true that the historic cross-currents of Occidental and Oriental life are only now being popularly charted, and it was perhaps natural that the interrelationship of the arts East and West should have been overlooked until our times. But in aspiring to present an integrated view of art development I could do no less than pay unaccustomed attention to the debt owing the Orient, and to the intrinsic excellence, especially, of Chinese works.

There is the opposite danger of an obsessive devotion to the idea of unity. It is only a perilously easy step from that to the judgment of history by a narrowed æsthetic formula, leading to the exclusion of all that does not nestle snugly within a theory or a manner. Let me hasten to affirm that this unity of art is an amazingly elastic one. Within it is embraced a boundless variety of individual expressions and idioms, racial influences, evolutionary changes, and there is a wide range of characteristic excellencies determined by the tools, materials, and methods of the several mediums.

The historian needs to encompass all these branchings and variations of art within his appreciation. And more, he will remember that the single picture is twenty pictures to as many beholders. The "genius" of the creator is no more unaccountable and mysterious than the varied ways of other men's seeing and enjoying. The commentator and guide needs to keep a rock footing in a conception of what art *is*, then to explore, in a thousand directions, the true creative expression under manifold guises. At the best he will sense a vague boundary between original creative art on the one side and illustration and ornamentation on the other, and the even vaguer line between æsthetic response and intellectual or literary appreciation. Let him then, in effect, forget all boundaries—and formulas—and proceed to record what he *feels* to be in the authentically artistic current.

The Greek statue, the African idol, the Byzantine crucifix—each manifestation should be made understandable in terms of the singular background and the determining intention of the artist, but no less should be emphasized the common factor binding all together. The world art-story, widened thus to include Egyptian gods, Chinese tomb-figurines, and Polynesian masks, or the paintings of Giotto, Hokusai, and Cezanne, will comprise an infinitely varied pageant of man's ways of life upon earth. But a pageant is the better for emphasized continuity and design.

In the planning stage, the book bore a subtitle "A review from the modern standpoint" This was phrased not only to suggest conformance with a new conception of unity, and concern with art as experience, but more especially to denote judgment with due (but I trust not excessive) regard to the formal values, the richness of the plastic element, in the works marking the current of creation. It is a foundation tenet of the modern position, as I understand it, that integral to appreciation of a work of visual art there is a subconscious appraisal of its inner value as painting or sculpture or building-expression, of its structural fullness and rhythmic vitality.

A book of history is not the place for an inquiry into the nature of this elusive and debated value or element. It is unnecessary to ask what is the expressive form or structural rhythm that lifts a creative painting—such as Tintoretto's *Christ with Mary and Martha* or a Duccio *Madonna* or Brueghel's *The Hired Shepherd*—above the estate of mere illustration, that renders immortal Giotto and El Greco and unnamed makers of icons and santos and African idols (though it is marked only by its absence in the once-vaunted works of Murillo, Greuze, and Sargent). But it is pertinent to note that a considerable body of appreciators has arisen believing that the cathedral or picture or statue is intrinsically judged, and fully enjoyed, only when automatic recognition of the formal fullness or rhythm accompanies, or precedes, appraisal on other accounts. That is, these people, undoubtedly the most numerous and characteristic moderns of today, recognize along with the criteria important to earlier generations of art lovers—along with the subject-and-meaning values and the technical craftsmanship—a super-value, a higher significance caught out of the centre of creation in a sort of formal structure or orchestration, possible only to the painting medium, or the sculpture, or the architecture.

If there is in process today—and few would question it—a fundamental reappraisal of all art treasured in museums, galleries, cathedrals and shrines, it is due to a comparatively recent recognition of such a formal and expressive value at the heart of the art work. It is this that already has changed art-history as understood among progressive collectors and students, so that El Greco is now brought into prominence as one of the supreme artists of past times, although he had all but disappeared in the waters of oblivion during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is this that has effected the admittance of Chinese paintings, Mayan sculptures, and Negro idols into "advanced" museums, and it is this that is forcing a reappraisal of Daumier and

Blake and a search for their richly creative paintings, long after their contemporaries had put them down, the one as a mere cartoonist, the other as a mere illustrator

In short, there is wide recognition of a fresh criterion, an overlooked key-value. But the historians have resigned themselves very little to such revolutionary realignment, have backed down hardly at all before this progressive revaluation

Since appreciation of El Greco has become a measure of one's progressivism, the conservatives still being blamed for overlooking him, and they in turn reproaching the "radicals" with having made a new god of him, hastily and uncritically enthroned one may easiest indicate one's critical whereabouts by reference to this monument. I cannot better define my own position, in entering upon the writing of a "new" history, than by saying that I see El Greco's canvases as characterized richly if not supremely by the determining formal and mystical values. I foresee that in future histories he is certain to demand more space than Phidias or Gainsborough or Velazquez—more even than Raphael, supreme divinity in the Victorian hierarchy.

In contrast, one can search through half a dozen of the most esteemed histories of art still prominent in public and private libraries, and piece out from them all not two pages about El Greco, nor find in the six books a single illustration of his painting. So great is the change now signalized. More pronouncedly, I believe than any earlier writer upon historical works I accept, out of conviction and study the judgment of the moderns who elevate El Greco to the top rank because of an achieved plastic richness, a formal intensity, and mystic intimations.

In undertaking to trace the one continuing stream of profoundly creative art through man's history, without discounting the more objective human and social elements I seem to see that the achievement of this formal value, in each art according to its kind affords the safest guide. It is the prime signpost to the appearance and reappearance of the stream of æsthetic verity down the ages. It is the one unchanging indication of a timeless excellence.

The book treats in general the visual arts excepting those which extend in time (the dance, theatre). The story is primarily of painting and sculpture, and the closely related minor arts of illumination, drawing and prints and of architecture. Beyond accounts of the so-called decorative arts—pottery, textiles, enamels, metalwork—find inclusion where formal values and decorative purposes have been intensely achieved.

When one historian follows after others there is certain to be a heavy debt owing, even though a new method of presentation be followed, and different values emphasized. I bear obligation to many scholars, explorers, and critics and more than customary to the artists who have left their credos. The descriptive bibliography at the end of the book is in general an indication of my sources, and I might well say an individual "thank you" to each of the authors concerned. To four or five I owe special acknowledgment in this more conspicuous place.

My debt to Elie Faure is less immediate than to several others, but in sum more important. His five-volume *History of Art* deals very little with fact but is incomparably rich in idea, inspiration, and even poetry. Through many years I have browsed among its pages. Although I differ with José Pijoan in a thousand matters of judgment, I have relied upon his three-volume *History of Art* for background material more consistently than upon any other general work, and I owe him a special debt for quoted material from ancient writers. I have not scrupled to quote the same passages and in two cases direct from his pages (though oftener preferring to retranslate). In any case, I make sincere and cordial acknowledgment to him.

For the rest, my indebtedness is less to the general histories—though I have consulted freely the standard works of Helen Gardner, Ernest H. Short, and Sir Banister Fletcher—than to specialists in the art of one and another period. I have added an occasional footnote carrying acknowledgment where I have quoted from these authorities and their books are duly listed and briefly evaluated in my bibliography. But it would be less than gracious to omit mention of the special obligation I have felt and the pleasure I have had, in reading Laurence Binyon's several works upon Oriental art, Lisle March Phillipps's *Form and Colour*, in the same field, D. Talbot Rice's *Byzantine Art*, Clive Bell's brief but meaty books upon French and nineteenth-century art, and Roger Fry's "introductions" to Flemish, British and French painting. Others to whom I have reason to be especially grateful are Julius Meier-Graefe, Herbert Read, Josef Szyszowski and Hendrik Willem van Loon. In the field of Italian art I must acknowledge a long-standing debt to John Addington Symonds and to Bernhard Berenson.

Two other sorts of indebtedness call for recording. On the one hand there is the aid, both intangible and in direct collaboration, which I have had from Martha Candler Cheney. There are no words to express the ways and the extent of my reliance upon her for help and advice.



On the other hand there are the specific instances of aid in securing photographs, and of co-operation from publishers. I am grateful to the Oxford University Press for permission to quote from T. E. Shaw's translation of the *Odyssey*, to the Marshall Jones Company for the quotation from Ralph Adams Cram's *The Significance of Gothic*, to Charles Scribner's Sons for quotations from Lisle March Philipps's *Form and Colour*, to the Liveright Publishing Corporation for the quotation from Hendrik Willem van Loon's *R. & R.*, to Harper & Brothers for the quotation from Rachel Annand Taylor's *Leonardo the Florentine*, to Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. for the quotations from Arthur Waley's *The Temple and Other Poems* and Witter Bynner's *The Jade Mountain*, to Dodd Mead & Company for the quotation from *Penguin Island*, by Anatole France, in the translation by A. W. Evans, to the editor and the publishers of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* for a quotation from an article by Laurence Bunyon, and to H. G. Wells, the Macmillan Company, and the Garden City Publishing Company for quotations from *The Outline of History*.

Arnold Genthe has graciously permitted reproduction of one of his photographs of the Parthenon and Warren Cheney has provided photographs specially taken of the Romanesque sculpture of France. J. B. Neumann and Alfred Stieglitz have kindly supplied photographs not otherwise accessible, as has the Museum of Modern Art. I cannot let pass the opportunity to thank also the staffs of the Art Division of the New York Public Library, the Avery Architectural Library, the Library of the School of Fine Arts, Yale University, and the Extension Division of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The acknowledgments in the captions will indicate how wide has been the co-operation received from museums, collectors, and artists. Each individual and institution there named has added to whatever success the book may achieve.

This strange phenomenon called art, which has been a concern of man through all historic ages, bears with it still so much of mystery, of latent meaning and concealed drift, that to claim any sort of finality for a history of it would be idle. One writes to bring emphasis upon those of its aspects that have taken on increased significance during the latest course of civilization. One presents a number of people, events, and "facts," chosen from the vast treasury of earlier records, to the end that a literally new truth may emerge.

Oscar Wilde once wrote "You may have noticed how, for some time, Nature has set herself to resemble the landscapes of Corot." Today there is detected less of humour and more of serious significance in that famous quip.

An artist divines in nature something not vouchsafed to other eyes, and he puts the resultant impression into art terms. The observer at first calls it untruth, then somehow (if he is open-minded) widens his vision and finds the enhanced image within his appreciation. Finally when he returns to nature he meets the apparent miracle of a landscape alive with the artist's particular beauty.

Perhaps even the historian or the critic, if he has seen more than others in the diorite statue of Khafre or in a *Venus* by Cranach, may by some juggling of records, ideas, and graphic illustration afford his reader new eyes to direct toward that picture or statue. I can ask nothing better for my history of art than that it thus, in some small measure, increase perception, clear the way to revelation. If one could lead his readers to see the pictures of Titian as El Greco saw them, or El Greco's pictures as Cezanne saw them, or Cezanne's pictures as a considerable number of today's moderns are seeing them—touched apparently with a mystical beauty—a train of enjoyment might be started that would mean fresh enjoyment of works of art from the Altamira cave paintings to the productions of the latest schools of abstraction. To know with the mind what events and works lie between should be merely a device for stimulating that sort of perception.

## NOTE ON THE FIRST REVISED EDITION

This third printing of *A World History of Art* goes out after a thorough rereading of every page, with corrections of two or three damaging errors kindly called to my attention by scholars as well as corrections of the few minor misprintings of dates or spellings inevitable in the first edition of a work so extensive. I have not attempted, however, to sketch in changes due to a war that has devastated museums and caused unprecedented migration of leading artists from country to country. This seems to belong still to "history in progress"—material for a larger rewriting when peace has returned. I hope that meantime the book will continue to prove its usefulness as stimulus to enjoyment. I am especially gratified that the volume has been adopted as textbook at many universities and schools.



# *A World History of Art*



## CHAPTER I

### When Art Was Young. *The Primitives as the World's Child-Artists*

IT WAS Captain Cook, writing about the savages of Tierra del Fuego, who recorded a truth that explains the art of primitive peoples everywhere. "They are content to be naked, but ambitious to be fine." It seemed to the practical captain, as to all his generation, a strange thing, arguing a childish disproportion in moral and cultural values, that men and women not risen high enough to clothe their bodies should care to decorate them. Charles Darwin too visited the Fuegians, and he observed with surprise that when given a bolt of red cloth the savages entirely overlooked its utility as covering for their nakedness. Instead they tore it into strips and wore them in the wrong places, for show, without regard to warmth or modesty.

It is apparently a trait universal among the "lowest" people known today, that they are "ambitious to be fine." And as far back as the roots of human culture have been traced, in history and prehistory, the instinct to decorate is evident. There may be no clothing, no alphabet, and no logical thinking, but rudimentary adornment is ever-present. *art is*

It was long after Captain Cook's voyages, and almost a century after Darwin's observation, that students of art began to take from the hands of archaeologists and ethnologists the evidences of early man's intuitive skill in ornamentation and, more rarely, in representation. Today the art museums are retrieving from the "natural history" collections the weapons of the South Sea Islander, the pottery of the Pueblo and the Mayan, and the sculpture, formerly considered crude, of the Eskimo and the prehistoric caveman. Of all the art once scorned and discarded, and now brought back for æsthetic enjoyment, the primitive has most notably come alive in the twentieth century. Not even the rediscovery of El Greco—classic example of revolu-

tionary reappraisal—is more striking than the elevation of uncivilized products to an honoured place in the galleries of authentic art

The works called primitive are widely distributed over both space and time. The cave paintings of the hunting peoples of the Pyrenees are dated by some archæologists at 10,000 B.C., by others at 50,000 B.C., while the collected carvings of the Maoris and the Tlingits, the baskets of the Pomos, and the latest rock drawings of the Bushmen are in the main products almost contemporaneous with our own generation. Geographically the display of primitive arts is drawn from territories as separated as Central Africa, Alaska, the South Sea Islands, France, and Peru.

From this a lesson is clear: it is useless to seek the origin of art in one place, or to attempt to date it at one moment in time. There is, indeed, no authority for speaking of the beginnings of art except as a convenience. The great number of objects known as early are products of ancient and recent peoples scattered over the several continents. The true earliest beginnings elude the searcher because they lie beyond any frontiers explored or explorable. There are, in a true sense, beginnings being made today.

And indeed in this matter the would-be historian is confounded by emerging paradox on every side. The paintings made by cavemen on the walls of Altamira in Spain, while the great ice sheet of the Glacial Age still covered most of Europe, millenniums before the beginnings of Asian, Egyptian, and Aegean civilizations, are now judged to be "modern" in the truest creative sense. On the other hand the idols of obscure Negro tribes—still considered savage—are perfectly in character when placed beside early Egyptian god-kings and the Han animals of China. The houses and utensils of the Maoris—those native New Zealanders whose culture was exterminated in the ruthless march of the European white—are now recognized as more distinctively beautiful, more consistently and subtly stylized than any original decorative accomplishments of the conquering English. The Maoris could not read or write, they had no sanitary conveniences, and their art was different from the academic European nineteenth-century product. Hence their culture was tagged "barbaric" by the invaders. But today the barbaric product is sought as more richly decorative, more sensitively expressive, than the run-out classic European. Such are the confusing currents or changes of current, set up by intensive study of the arts that the Victorians termed savage and rude, or merely "primitive"—having in mind the dictionary definition, "simple, old-fashioned, crude."

Beyond the confusion, nevertheless, there can be detected an elusive likeness among most of the works of early art recently brought to light. Remembering that some of the wider cultures have been included merely because their modes of ornament and representation lack the high polish and refined naturalism of European traditional practice, and that these will ultimately be judged as different but not elementary cultures—such as, for instance, the Mayan and the Benin—remembering that these are beside the point, one may note a distinctive first aspect, a recognizable character in most of the works called primitive. It arises, perhaps, from a preserved simplicity, an uninvolved directness of statement, and an intuitive grasp of decorative or plastic unity. The link is one of feeling, of approach, of unidentifiable nuances of formal expression, rather than a material or a stylistic likeness. But there is a stamp or special vividness or direct vigour in the arts not yet civilized, which marks them off as a product of unlettered, not yet mature men.

Art, then, is early, youthful, by virtue of a *spirit*, not because of its occurrence at a certain stage of history. Just as, in the stream of time as men know it, there is no point at which one can make a mark and say, here art began, so there is no second point indicating the end of primitive art and the beginning of mature or civilized art. Some of the earliest designs are far along in technique, elaboration, and sensitiveness. Some almost contemporary work is primitively simple, non-intellectual, naïve. The quality that distinguishes early inventive design may best be called, perhaps, the spirit of the *childhood of art*.

It is art that is typically unstudied, not too deeply thought about, occurring spontaneously, generally free from exact imitational intent, richly formal. It may thus appear naïve or crude to the sophisticated, logic-trained mind of the adult European or American, to the practical, business-keen, professional mind, for its thinking, if thinking has been part of the creative process, is comparable to that of children, who are illogical, disconcertingly direct, with an instinctive feeling for composition and order but without prepossessions about "art as imitation" or about moral intention or narrative interest.

In the childhood of art the creator was nearer to God, expressed himself with clairvoyant directness and inspired vividness. Primitive art, in the right sense, is of that golden time when the soul is near the Great Source, when an harmonious order is divined in nature, when the shaping hands obey an inner feeling of rhythmic progression and cosmic rightness.

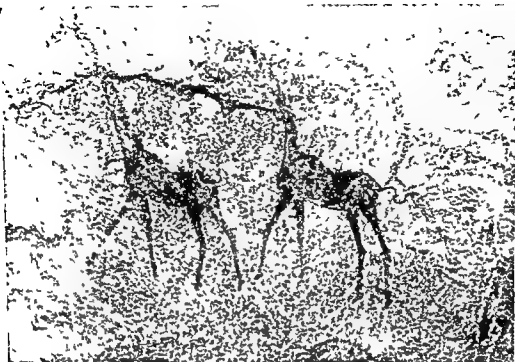
The study of the primitive may be undertaken first in either of two vast fields. Today the approach is oftener by way of the arts and crafts of living savages—those peoples existing still in an elementary hunting life, untouched by the march of major Occidental or Oriental cultures. This is the field surest of yielding examples truly primitive. It is then possible to cross over into the other field, that of prehistoric archaeology, of relics recovered from the silt of the ages, and from caves reopened.

Ernst Grosse about a half-century ago observed that the word "primitive" was being applied to such a mixed collection of products that no true deduction or conclusion was possible. He made the point that the best approach to the beginnings would be through the study of peoples still at the lowest stage of culture—that is, peoples without writing or agriculture or use of metals—and he proposed a start among the surviving tribes still in the hunting stage. He laid out for systematic comparison the arts of the African Bushmen, the Australians, the Eskimos, and of such remnant tribes as the Botocudos and Fuegians of South America and the Andaman Islanders.

If he put his finger on the real material origin of art, it did not greatly help those who are interested from the point of view of æsthetic experience and enjoyment. For he concluded that the ambition to be fine led first to body-marking: that art began with painting, scarifying, and tattooing the skin for adornment. This practice is common to all the primitive hunting tribes still existent except the Eskimos (whose skin, because of the climate, is never seen, and therefore is not a good place for decoration). The art that is technically first, then, is by its nature, however intricate, colourful, and "stylish" in execution, hardly open to our enjoyment.

But a little farther along in the range, when hair-dress has evolved into removable head-dress, and when necklaces and girdles or loincloths have led to something approaching clothes, the evidences of artistic achievement may be seen in our museums—and if the fashions are barbaric, the visual impression is often compositionally sound, the decorative effect pleasing. In the "applied art" range that is supposed to have developed next, in the ornamentation and shaping of weapons—weapon-handles, baskets, pottery, probably in that order, there is a wealth of visually engaging, not to say gorgeous, design. After the early crafts products came sculpture and painting, perhaps by way of ritual mask and totem, perhaps by elaboration of mere ornament. Architecture was a late addition to the consciously matured arts.

A scientific study of the evidence, then, leaves little doubt that human



*Giraffes* Detail of rock painting by Bushmen, Southern Rhodesia *Frobenius Collection*, Research Institute for the Morphology of Civilization, Frankfurt-on-Main  
[Courtesy Museum of Modern Art]

tribes, no matter how isolated, independently develop ornamentation and, usually, graphic representation. A generalization seems justified: that the instinct for art is universal. But only a little way along the road of artistic creation there are wide divergencies. An earlier generation's favourite theories on the origin of art seem completely set aside. It no longer seems proven that art grew out of religious ritual and devotional exercise. Nor can the theory of a purely utilitarian origin any longer be seriously defended. The widely advertised generalization that all primitive ornament is symbolic has likewise collapsed. Against all these theories the advocate of the belief that art arose as intuitive expression, simply because creating it and seeing it "pleased" creator and beholder, seems to have as good a case as any, although his contention too is unprovable.

The fact is that at a certain stage in man's ascent from animal-like dependence upon nature, conscious art appears, and its roots are inextricably tangled



with those of dawning religious thought and activity, with economic conditions and utilitarian customs, and—beyond explaining—with impulses and pleasures not understood, with play and love and spiritual intimations. But no one of these may confidently be said to be the mother of art.

Why should we care greatly about the nature of the origin, if the object speaks to us visually, emotionally, æsthetically? Again and again the rhythm holds us, a new revelation of order, of design, is apparent. The moment our eyes catch sight of a cave painting, a Negro king's sceptre, or a Maori carved oar, the light of enjoyment leaps up within us. Among those "lowest" peoples, even, despite the limitations imposed by the scarcity of materials, by the comparative rudeness of the tools of art, by the paucity of techniques and motives—among those peoples we find examples that stir us no less certainly than the works of the outstanding artists of our own European-American culture.

A Pomo basket, an ivory carving of the Eskimos, an idol from Central Africa, a decorated wooden bowl from Melanesia—these are fair examples of the arts among the least civilized, the least intellectual of the world's people, all have an authentic plastic completeness—are rich in emotional appeal. All, moreover, comport with each other, and again with the latest manifestations of Western art, with the new "stripped" architecture, with expressionist sculpture and machine-age crafts. They are separated only from the products of the great ages of realism.

The Pomo Indians of California, so little advanced in the cultural scale that they had no agriculture, are said to have excelled all the rest of the world, ancient and modern, in basket-making. The basket shapes are often as beautifully proportioned as Chinese bowls or Greek vases, the weaves are technically of an extraordinary fineness and textural grace, the ornamental designs are fitted both to the materials of the art and the uses of the receptacle—and they speak, beyond of that extra sense which endows an object with an orderly rightness and imparts to it an imaged rhythm. Basket-making was the outstanding art of the Pomos, and it was exclusively the work of the women.

The Eskimos, on the other hand, are best represented by carvings and engravings on the ivory of walrus tusks. Here the men are the artists, and their gift is more in the field of representation and less limited by the conventions of ornamentation. Ornament may be described as design within a pre-

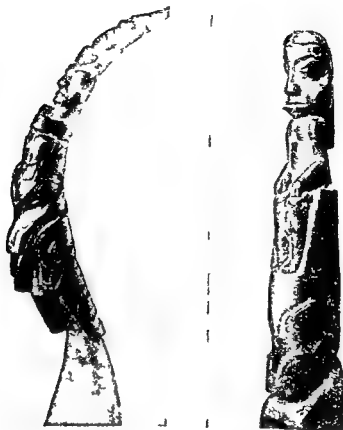


Amerindian baskets by weavers of various California tribes

[*Courtesy American Museum of Natural History*]

determined space, for decorative effect. It leans heavily upon the elementary principles of symmetry, contrast, and repetition, whereas the arts of free delineation are more usually asymmetrical, without repetition and of a dynamic unity. The Eskimos' incised drawings on ivory or bone and their independent figures show a notable skill in the use of rudimentary graver or knife, and there is primitive devotion to the purely sculptural values. Contact with the white man has recently led to manufacture for sale rather than for use and pleasure, with a consequent trend toward the lesser virtues of naturalism and showiness.

Geographically half-way between these two peoples almost innocent of the commonest cultural accomplishments, there is a district in which the outstanding art is again different. Among the Indians of Puget Sound and Alaska, more 'advanced' than either the Eskimos or the Pomo, wood-carving is the supreme art. Vessels are of wood, canoes are of wood, there is wood sculpture, as in the widely known masks and totem poles, and even



Woodcarvings by the Haida Indians spoon handle and small totem  
 [Courtesy American Museum of Natural History]

wooden huts and wooden hats. Other arts are practised, including weaving, bone-carving, basketry, and decorative painting. But the Northwest Indians—again the men—are most accomplished as skilled carpenters and sculptors in wood.

The very different development of the arts and crafts in these three independent North American cultures indicates an additional formative factor. Obviously the plentifulness of certain sorts of material, together with the influence of rigorous or friendly climate, helped to shape the first channels and courses of artistic development. Also the virtual monopoly of art by the



Rock painting by the Bushmen *Facsimile by staff of Professor Leo Frobenius*  
[*Courtesy Museum of Modern Art*]

women in the one case, and its restriction to the men in the other two, suggest a plural rather than a single origin and path of early art

The true primitive artists of Africa are the Bushmen. Their achievement is most pronounced in rock paintings, a sort of outdoor mural art. And the points that have particularly interested both the art student and the ethnologist are these. The Bushmen have observed and recorded the movements of animals with a degree of accuracy very seldom if ever attained in the course of civilized art. While figures of men appear in their scenes of war and hunt, very seldom are flower or tree forms found. That is, the Bushmen saw more sharply than other peoples the things that interested them in their hunting existence. Furthermore, their artists occasionally figure the animals in other than the simple profile view common to most elementary peoples, and they display more understanding of technical perspective than does any other artist group untrained in scientific optics. By a convention of diminishing size they achieve the sense of space and the effect of remote figures.

At the time that the works of the Bushmen were first studied, the canon of natural imitation was central in the judgment of art, and the discoverers were thrilled by the realistic accuracy of observation and delineation, and by the perspectives. Perhaps it is more to the point today to consider that this still savage people so masterfully pulled free from casual surrounding circumstance the figures that interested them, and composed with not a little

But let us not—when we have thus looked up from a too absorbed study of the actual and imitational, when we have learned to look out over all art with uninhibited comprehension—let us not deny that knowledge of art *after* seeing may increase or echo the pleasure. Even a glance at the several theories advanced as to the way of art's first coming may multiply enjoyment.

Without subscribing to one theory above the others—for the perplexities are many and our position as enjoyers demands no final conclusion or allegiance—we may gain something from considering some of the most widely publicized theories as to its genesis, as to how the near-savage peoples came to have art at all.

The first of these ascribes earliest art to an inborn urge to ornamentation. Artistic expression, being universal to *Homo sapiens*, may fairly be attributed to an innate impulse to be fine, to improve the "looks" of oneself and one's surroundings. The lowest form, painting and tattooing of the body, was undertaken, the ornamentalists believe, merely for pleasure in adornment and in being admired for that adornment. This simple theory of "art for the eye's sake" has been subjected to some modifications, however, in which there are taken into consideration the impulses to increase sexual attractiveness and to stand out from one's fellows.

In any case, even the most elementary striping and spotting of the body would develop pattern and composition. By the time the urge was carried over to the enrichment of baskets and clay pots there might already be "motives" developed—repeated thin and thick stripes or fields of dots or zig-zag lines, even geometrical figures like circles and diamonds. Ornament might first appear on seams, margins, joints, and so become bands of repeated figures, or running borders, dividing the total area into "fields" of decoration.

It is just here that the utilitarian influence strongly enters in. There are, of course, elaborate theories to the effect that art arises only out of use. But it seems fairer to say that use *conditions* art, rather than that it gives rise to art. One of the patent truths about primitive "applied art" is that it rarely runs counter to utilitarian values. It accents structure, enriches texture, adds variety of effect, but it seldom becomes so concerned with show that structure is distorted or use values impaired. We may agree with the utilitarians that most art seems to begin in some relation to objects of use (the body included), even, that early ornament is often found applied where it might originally have grown out of the attempt to increase utility, as in the reinforcement at the rim of a basket or in the graceful grip of a handle. But that seems no rea-

son for denying the existence of an independent æsthetic sense or activity

The weakness of the ornamentation theory is that it fails to cover those types of art that have sometimes been esteemed the most important of all: the arts of free delineation. From the elementary impulse toward decoration men were somehow led to the composition of pictures and statues which took their subject-matter from nature. Ornamentation was then no longer the main object. There was a different sort of pleasure and meaning involved. The use theory, in the practical sense, likewise can be related to sculpture and picture only by most tenuous ties.

It was from this distinction between decoration and delineation that a third group of theorists drew their evidence and their arguments for a religious origin of all art, and they enjoyed for a time a remarkable vogue. Art, they said, had indubitably grown up as an adjunct of magic and religion. Because most of the early figures discovered were, or might have been, idols, totems, and fetishes, it was inferred that all were invented as offerings to the gods. Even the cave paintings dealt almost unfailingly with animals, and they were doubtless a symbolic offering to the gods to the end that the hunter might be favoured in the chase of the figured beasts. To these interpretations of representational art, there was appended a theory that music, dramatic art, and poetry had grown out of the dance and that the dance had originated as religious ritual. Even every form of ornament was found to be symbolic. *It all* grew out of superstition, belief in magic, devotion, ritual.

It is true that evidences of religious beliefs and activities have been found wherever investigation of early man has been made. Religion seems to have existed "in the beginning"—like art. And it is easy to see throughout civilized history how intimately and nobly the arts have served ritual and devotion. But the general theory is no longer put forward so dogmatically as it used to be.

Is it not probable that, if men thought of art works as being pleasing to the gods, it was because at an earlier stage art had already pleased the people? The best must be dedicated to the tribal deities. But how did the dance, the image, the decorated vessel come to be considered good? Did not the *pleasure* of art come before the devotional *utilization* of art?

Indeed some extreme critics of the religious theory suggest that art activity preceded religion and led men into conscious pursuit of the latter, rather than the other way round. Sensitivity to a sort of mystic beauty, to the expression of something beyond visible nature, might prepare the way to the

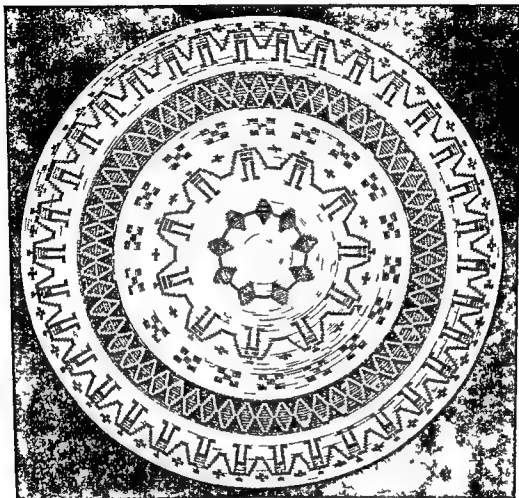
seeing the "savage" as a phase of oneself, the childhood of art as a part of all art, one recognizes that the unintellectual but eagerly expressive shaper of a horn dagger-handle or a decorated bowl has poured into his work a measure of authentic plastic value, a timeless formal loveliness

Not too much effort, please, to reason it out. Let us say, here is art enjoyable to us, by way of collateral interest, here is what we know (or deduce) of the life and thought of the human beings who created it. It is not necessary to discover just what power set a man to work to ornament his pots, paint pictures on the walls of his cave or on the face of his shield.

He was a man very much like you and me, a body born into a disordered and not-too-sympathetic world, a pent-up limited individual in a varied society, beginning to use his brain consciously to overcome natural handicaps, beyond that a bundle of unaccountable perceptions, instincts, emotions. He saw the marvellous, sometimes terrifying world about him, guessing larger secrets and forces behind. He fought the (other) animals, protected his young, reproduced his kind. Why did he become an artist recording images, fixing sensations expressing feelings? Who can know? Did *he*? Was it to set up a contrast to the disordered surrounding world—an echo of a felt harmonious order beyond common seeing? Was it an attempt at explanation? Or supplication? Or mere emotional overflow?

In one way or another all plastic art is an expression of how a man feels in the universe, set down in images visually affective to other men, who feel and enjoy that something too. Expression on one side, pleasure on the other. A bit of order in a disordered world—a bit of unity in a disjointed environment, a hint of controlled rhythm among the endless casual motions and vibrations and shocks that make up life. And the savage grasped the heart of it before our elaborate processes of intellectualization and criticism and explanation had begun. That is, he got down in comprehensible equivalents in a form that itself has vitality, movement, rhythm, the thing that essentially is life in art. Let us enjoy as spontaneously as we can the Pomo basket, the Alaskan totem, the Nigerian idol.

No one would deny the gains made in the name of intellectual civilization. If spontaneous art suffered always in the more arid periods of reasoned philosophies and material inventiveness—and it is a commonplace that it did—perhaps the world was put that much ahead by having more people released for



Amerindian basket design gambling tray of the Tulare tribe California  
 [Columbia University Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology]

a wider æsthetic enjoyment. The sin would be to consider material and intellectual advance the whole of progress or even its major phase and aim. Every prophet of the day counts up the corresponding losses in the realm of the spirit.

Art no less returns to pick up the lost threads of intuitional abstract and emotional expression, asks once more for the direct æsthetic response. The recent scientific, highly documented art is discounted; the wisdom of the childhood of art is prized; the unstudied pots, baskets, and idols are set up on stages for our enjoyment in a hundred museums, in thousands of homes.

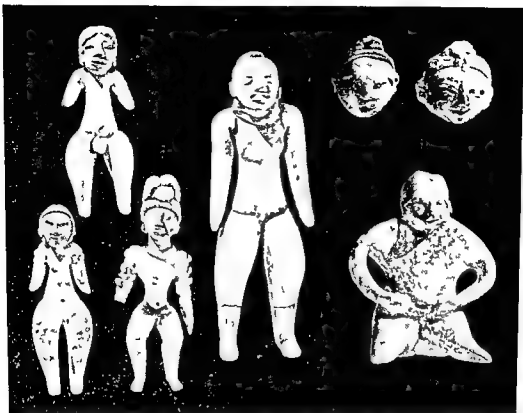


creation of gods and to idolatry. Even the so-called "Venuses" of Neolithic times pose the question: are the ideas primarily associated with Venus—beauty, pleasure, desire—to be so confidently tagged "religious"? May we not say rather that the desire and the feeling for beauty existed first, then crystallized into a cherished god-symbol?

It is better, perhaps, to withhold allegiance from this theory too, at least until religion is more accurately defined. It may be added that the application of the religious-symbol theory to every shred of ornament—the zigzag meaning lightning, the circle a sun, the arc a rainbow, the triangle a mountain—is by no means as acceptable as it once was. It has been found that where the symbolic significance was supposed to have been long fixed, there is not uniformity of interpretation, and a primitive of one tribe, pressed for an explanation of the motives on the pottery or baskets of another, will "read in" new meanings.

It seems as likely that ornament began in markings without symbolic intent, pure inventions, or copied from butterfly wings or shells or snakes or flowers, and that later generations, seeing a likeness to animal or rain or mountain in the design—as you or I might see a face in the clouds—developed a tradition of gods, spirits, and devils symbolized by it. And doubtless *thereafter* the motives were repeated with devotional intent. Thus the Hopi or Navajo or Arapaho symbolism. Thus an almost abstract ornamental language often with double meanings: a mere series of parallel strokes signifying running water and also life unending, two crosses, the morning star, guiding men. Without in any way depreciating the importance of these symbolic languages, these formalized equivalents of natural surroundings and ideas, one may still question whether they are not of secondary value in understanding the Hopi pot or the Navajo blanket, and particularly whether the development of so complex a language did not come after a simple birth of art in the impulse to please or to express one's joy in living.

A fourth major theory expounds the view that man creates out of an innate necessity, that to express something intuitively felt within but not evident in the outward sense-world is a primary aim of existence. This overflow of the emotions, this creation of an object bearing a special sort of artistic life, is considered a phenomenon important enough to stand on its own feet, so to speak. It needs no explanation as being an aid to the use of things or as being called out by religious piety or fear. It is a reality of its own sort. And indeed this "sheer creation" theory seems as defensible today as any



Clay figures by Indians of Mexico and Central America  
*[Courtesy American Museum of Natural History]*

Granted that expression is a necessity to man, and that plastic expression is justified on its own account, some commentators want to pin the activity, or its origin, down to a single sort of giving forth. The realists, of course, see its origin in an instinct to imitate, to reproduce the objects and actions observed in nature. But this seems now a narrow view, adopted during the age of cramping materialism, and it has lost authority since the challenge of expressionism to Victorian naturalism. It would seem to be sufficiently answered, so far as primitive art is concerned, by the fact that, while ornamental art is universal, reproductive art is not. Everywhere one finds body-painting and scarification, or ornamental design in pottery and weaving, or decorated arrows and axes. But not even among all surviving tribes are drawing and representational sculpture found. In short, there was art before imitation.

We need pause no more than a moment over the romantic myths invented by the imitationalists to account for the birth of art. Perhaps best known is the one recounted by a writer of ancient Rome that a girl grasping from the hearth a half-burnt stick, traced the outline of her lover's shadow as cast by the flames on the rock wall of the cave. From that beginning is supposed to have grown the whole body of civilized art. And indeed in later years the charcoal stick had an honoured place, a purpose. But the popular myth is too facile and sentimental to explain the vast complex of tools and vessels, of ornaments and idols, of picturing and dressing and building, that constitutes primitive art. The evidence in general seems to lead back to only one possible generalization: it is an innate impulse in man to create in visually affective terms, in living image and ornament: it is natural in him to delight in formal creations.

Out of impulse and instinct, along with early thought, crystallizing custom, and emerging religious feeling, arises this duality of formal expression and æsthetic appreciation. It is early complicated by practical purposes—use, devotion, sex attraction, and symbolism—but it is art as soon as living expressive form is produced, and that seems to happen as soon as man can be said to be man.

The "masterpieces" of prehistoric art are, all critics agree, the paintings of the Reindeer Age on the walls and ceilings of caves in Europe and Africa. If we had been pursuing the course of art chronologically (instead of picking up the threads in the products of still-existing primitive peoples) we should have begun with the cavemen's pictures. If you read of Cro-Magnon art or the art of the Troglodytes, it is the pictures made by the cave-dwellers of the Palæolithic or Old Stone Age that are meant.

Had we met these amazing works first we might have been misled into assuming that the ancient artist sprang full-equipped and a master of his craft from the brain of some Cro-Magnon Zeus. It is more likely that the painters of the bison and reindeer and mammoth on the rock walls in Spain and France represent the culmination of a long apprenticeship, the ripe fruit at the end of age-long development.

For these earliest pictures have the features considered typical of the true masterpiece: plastic completeness, intense life, monumental proportions. They also often have that incidental virtue which was for the Victorians a basic excellence: extraordinary truth of observation.



*Mith Cave painting at Les Eyzies Dordogne France Facsimile in Frobenius Collection [Courtesy Museum of Modern Art]*

Before the era of the rock paintings there were ages in which sculpture was the outstanding art. We need not go into the methods by which the archaeologists arrived at this conclusion: they concern the layers of debris left by successive cultures on the floors of the caves, the order in which are found the relics of hunting man—and sculptor man and painter man.

The chronological sequence of early enduring products is this (there is no way of course in which the perishable arts such as tattooing and basketry can be correlated): first of all there were rudely chipped flint weapons and stone clubs and tools hardly altered from the useful shapes nature had provided; the technique improving gradually over very great periods of time; then the rudest sculptures, mostly obese Venuses; and with them, or possibly preceding them, designs scratched on reindeer horn and occasionally horn designs in the round; then wall scratchings and finally wall paintings.

All these arts developed in the Palæolithic or Old Stone Age, which may have been 50 000 years ago or 30,000, or a mere 15,000

The arts of the following Neolithic period, the New Stone Age—the stone weapons and pottery of the Swiss lake-dwellers, of early man in Britain, and of savages in a hundred other localities—have little traceable connexion with the Palæolithic. The stone axes are often polished, the flints beautifully shaped and refined, and pottery is a common industrial product. But curiously enough there is no art of the New Stone Age that rivals in originality, plastic effectiveness, and sheer artistry the murals of the cave-man of so many millenniums earlier.

The cave paintings at Altamira and in the Dordogne cliffs are hardly to be classed as polychrome works. Colour is utilized beautifully, but there are seldom more than two hues in one composition. But a single colour, usually red ochre, or brown, may be used with extraordinary variation of intensity. Many of the animals assume, by virtue of the drawing and colour gradation, a remarkable largeness and roundness, and a sort of sculptural fullness in space. Within the limits natural to the isolated figure (without compositional relationship to background, frame, or depicted environment) they achieve a sense of plastic completeness.

This is accomplished with a fine economy of line, with extraordinary concentration upon essentials. The cave-man has a masterly understanding of what to leave out. His pictures represent, indeed, a graphic art that is mature, certain, economical, intensified. The more is the wonder since the artists must have worked with the rudest tools, on imperfect wall surfaces, often by fire-light and torchlight. Of course the picture was done from memory, without a present model or sketches.

The outlines are rhythmic, flowing, variable, the lines vigorous and crisp, or on occasion melting and sensitive. The modelled forms undulate, move. They are vibrant with a life of their own.

These were the works of true savages, of men existing by the hunt, still far from agriculture and alphabet and metal-crafts, living close to the animals, sheltered only by the caves provided by mother earth. They have fire, they practise rude stone tool-making, they have invented sewing-needles of bone, yet they are æons from the dawn of architecture, law, and writing. But already art has swung a great circle from barest ornament and roughly shaped stone weapon to sculpture and bas-relief and finally to two-dimensional drawing and painting. Man has achieved a summit of pictorial art, he has



*Bison Charging* Cave painting at Altamira, Spain Facsimile by Abbe Henri Breuil  
[Cartailhac and Breuil *La Caverne d'Altamira*]

travelled a course that will be traversed again only by struggle through ten thousand or thirty thousand years. He has developed a mature painting technique and a lasting pictorial achievement.

The most likely explanation of this art is that it represents the work of the artist as priest: that depiction of animals had now become part of a ritual preparatory to the all-important hunt. The animals depicted are those fitted for food, particularly the bison and the reindeer. Lions, jackals, snakes, and other "useless" species are noticeably absent from the Cro-Magnon gallery of art. Many of the paintings, too, are placed in the most remote and inaccessible inner caves and grottoes. They were obviously not intended merely for adornment. It is suggestive of the religious or magic theory, moreover, that there are savages of today whose magic-makers scratch or paint the quarry-animal on rocks as part of ceremonies preceding the hunt.

The German scientist Leo Frobenius, reasoning from this apparent survival, and refusing to believe that a culture so vital as that of the Cro-Magnons could simply die out (as practically all authorities inferred had been the case),

organized between 1904 and 1935 a series of explorations among the caves and cliffs of Europe and Africa, and traced a line of probable descent for the cave-wall artists. It now seems proven that during the late Ice Age they moved down into Africa. Frobenius and his associates discovered rock engravings and paintings at sites scattered from the Northern Sahara to the Transvaal. These are dated variously from 10 000 B.C. to the nineteenth century A.D. The two "styles" existing in European cave-art, termed by scientists Francocantabrian and Levant, are recognizable in the African examples: the one concerned with animal "portraits" generally monumental in size, the other with action pictures of men and their enterprises. A great deal that was learned of legend and of surviving custom in relation to the works of art, supported the idea of its ceremonial purpose.

Here apparently is an example of the work of art—sometimes consummately artistic—as an adjunct of religious or magical ceremony. It throws little light, however, on the controversy over the origin of æsthetic expression and appreciation, for this is painting at a culmination, far from whatever may have been its first source, accompanying perhaps a highly developed religious consciousness. It affords a fair parallel to the later art of temple and cathedral, of Egyptian murals, Buddhist sculpture, and Christian stained glass.

If the cave paintings are relics of magic-working rites, there is on the other hand evidence of mere decorative impulse in the contemporaneous and earlier carved horn dart-throwers and weapon handles of the men of the Old Stone Age. These are often incised with drawings of the animals that appear on the rock walls, and sometimes the draughtsman is superbly economical and expressive. At other times the shaping and ornamentation are abstract.

The sculptures in the round are interesting and crudely expressive, but in general they lack the skilful touch and the vitality of the paintings. The commonest type-figure is a so-called Venus, very fat and flabby according to modern notions of womanly beauty, but sculpturally sound in conception, and the individual figures are sometimes plastically alive and effective. The Willendorf and Mentone Venuses are typical. These may be votive figures having to do with rites designed to conserve or increase the fruitfulness of women. There are also full rounded and half relief animal figures in some of the caves of the Pyrenees. They are characterized by the lifelikeness that is so notable, not to say startling, in the painted bison and reindeer.

Incidentally, it may be mentioned that for years after the first discovery



Primitive "Venus," ascribed to Old Stone Age, from cave at Willendorf, Austria  
[Photo, courtesy American Museum of Natural History]

of the cave murals, archaeologists and critics refused to accept them as works left by prehistoric savages. Eminent authorities insisted that the pictures had been "planted" by some recent eccentric or joker. The argument that seemed to officialdom conclusive proof of a recent origin was the lifelikeness of the figures, their anatomical correctness, and their perfectly observed attitudes. No artist before the invention of the camera, they insisted, could have been endowed with such understanding of instantaneous pose and fleeting movement. For years a controversy raged over the authenticity of the first discovered murals, at Altamira in Spain, and it was only after further explorations had brought to light scores of widely separated examples in Spain and



in France that scepticism was stilled. Today the cavemen's art can be seen *in situ* in a dozen localities in Southwestern Europe, the Sahara Atlas Mountains, the Libyan Desert, South Africa, and Scandinavia.

While the accuracy of delineation and the amazing fidelity to observed movement still seem a virtue, the greater wonder is that the Dordogne and Altamira and African murals have an artistic livingness of their own, that in the achievement of expressive form (in addition to the lifelike transcription of interesting natural forms) they rank with the most sensitive and impressive graphic work of the Chinese and Japanese, and in vigour with the animal art of the Scythians.

After the Old Stone Age there came a pause for change of climate and scene. When the curtain lifts again the caveman is gone from Europe and graphic art has immeasurably retrogressed. But the weapons of the New Stone Age, as already noted, are refined in technique and—if one may be permitted the word—in feeling. The stone is shaped more sensitively and the surface is brought to a pleasing polish. New arts that depend upon proportioning and ornament have been ushered in, most notably pottery. This, of course, is a link to Sumeria and Egypt and Mycenæ. In this time savage man is beginning to domesticate certain animals and is rudely initiating agriculture. He also weaves cloth. The end of the New Stone Age is the beginning of the Bronze Age, when metal weapons begin to take the place of stone. Metal jewellery becomes common and metal vessels occasionally stand beside the decorated pottery. The relics indicate an advance in ornamentation and in sureness of the human hand in craftsmanship. The Age of Iron follows—and thus civilization is reached, and written history.

It is worth noting that the two stages of culture known as the Old and the New Stone Ages were lived through in widely separated parts of the earth, and that relics of the Neolithic Age are discovered beneath the foundations of civilized society on five continents. But the dates are variable, and Europe was to remain in the prehistoric "Ages" long after historic cultures, intellectually and artistically advanced, had developed in the valleys of the Nile and the Euphrates, in Persia and India and China. It is in the New Stone Age that Western Europe and England see the erection of menhir, dolmen, and cromlech—huge stone pillars or slabs raised up as isolated monuments or in logical architectural order. A few fragmentary "temples" like that at Stonehenge in England and the "table rocks" of Brittany are evidence of prehistoric



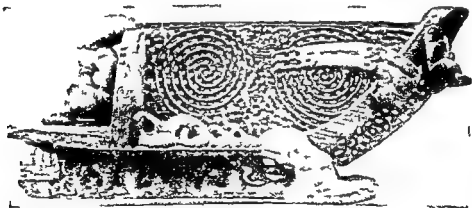
Negro sculpture exhibiting simple primitive rhythms British Nigeria Collection  
*Baron Eduard von der Heydt [Courtesy Museum of Modern Art]*

beginnings of conscious architecture but they have little visual significance today and the contemporaneous structures of wood and reed and hide have of course disappeared. The menhirs and occasional slabs in the dolmens are enriched with engraved or sculptured ornament. But the true beginnings of architectural design are more profitably studied in the tombs on the Nile and in the earliest ruins in Mesopotamia.

The rather sparse relics of the New Stone Age and of the Bronze Age, insofar as they belong to prehistory, are marked by that simplicity and that

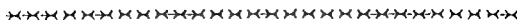
enjoyment and to remind him that from the first appearance of conscious art among men certain timeless excellences were achieved certain fundamental values grasped and that these were handed down traditionally in some simple civilizations

Almost at the source a basic plastic aliveness distinguished men's efforts to express themselves in visual ornament and image. The same aliveness underlies some art that never 'grew up'. The differences are rather in the elaboration of subject-matter, the refinements of finish and the intricacy of surface pattern.



Carved wooden prow of a Maori canoe  
[Courtesy American Museum of Natural History]

## CHAPTER II



### The Earliest Known Worlds Asiatic Centres of Art

OUT of the excavated ruins of Lagash, a city-state that flourished nearly fifty centuries ago in Sumeria, explorers have recovered fragments of a stone tablet, sculptured in low relief, which had been set up as a war memorial by King Eannatum. On one side the monument recounts in picture and text the military exploits of the all-conquering king. He is depicted over-size, leading his compact and orderly phalanx of soldiers into battle, the while they trample underfoot the bodies of the slain. Near by are heaps of their dead enemies, while above are vultures carrying away dismembered parts of the slaughtered. On the other side of the tablet a god is shown upholding the heraldic device of the city-state of Lagash and neatly destroying its enemies. (The device, incidentally, is a lion-headed eagle, interesting to-day as the direct ancestor, the earliest so far discovered, of the national eagle-emblem of the German heraldic device, the imperial Russian arms, and the official American seal.)

This one tablet, which is labelled by historians the earliest known example of a story told in pictures, of sustained visual-narrative art, may be offered as an example of the spirit that most often dominated Sumerian, then Babylonian, then Assyrian art. From 2800 B.C., the date of the stele, to the fall of the Chaldeans before the Persians in the sixth century B.C., war itself was to be first among the arts, and the standard subject-matter of pictorial artists was to be kings, gods, military conquest and hunting. The gods bulk less and less as time goes on, and animals, particularly bulls and lions, bulk larger, but throughout, war is the supreme interest, and the conquering king is the dominant figure. King Eannatum ushers in an art that is imperialistic, illustrative, useful for frightening enemies and thrilling patriots. The psychology is almost startlingly up-to-date. Eannatum's stele clearly warns that

plastic sensibility which are characteristic of the true, recurring childhood of art. The Old Stone Age at its most mature and superb point of mastery, in the cave paintings, and the Neolithic stage as exemplified in the products of present-day Amerindian or Eskimo or Polynesian cultures, partake of the same informing "primitive spirit." And it is this strong, youthful spirit of art, this direct unrealistic statement, and this intuitive plastic expression, that the moderns of 1880-1930 have self-consciously tried to recapture. In their avid search for the essential rhythmic quality, for the formal synthesis, they turned the world's attention to many a lost or obscured culture. The Palæolithic things were reappraised and extravagantly praised, and products from Africa, New Guinea, and Alaska were brought into the galleries.

"Primitive" became a blanket term of approval—and in the general excitement it was made to cover some cultures not now to be denied the label "civilized." Searchers for the true primitive example will do well to note that a great deal of the art that has been brought out of "uncivilized" Africa and South America, as well as the Maori art and large sections of the Melanesian, is really eloquent of cultures æsthetically mature, the product of inventive and—up to a point—thinking peoples.

Intellectually they did not advance along the logical and scientific lines followed by the European culture, and because they lacked written language, complex government, and guns, they were considered barbaric. But there is reason to call the Maoris spiritually advanced, and the natives of New Guinea civilized in their own special way, and the African nations are sometimes found to have had agriculture, urban organization, foreign diplomacy, and medicine. The Mayans of Mexico are known to have excelled in such abstruse subjects as astronomy and engineering.

These are not, in short, to be classed with the cultures in which man is still close to the purely animal life where he is hunter and fisher, without cultivated fields or shelter or skilled manufactures. They are not rightly called primitive nations, and theirs has not remained a primitive art. And yet something of primitive directness, simplicity, and formal vigour has persisted. Their artists seem never to have lost the early vividness of statement in an over-refinement of means, never to have substituted imitational representation for formal creation. They avoided the pitfalls spread for the European artist by over-intellectualized culture, by academic rule-making, by the camera-mund.

Those non-European civilizations, whether African or American or of the



*Huse and Risher*

Negro sculpture illustrating entry of sophisticated methods Collection Louis Carre  
[Courtesy Museum of Modern Art]

South Seas will find place later in the main story of "historic" art. But because the spirit of the childhood of art lingered on—in limited African and American areas persists even today—there are added among the illustrations here two representative Negro sculptures and a Maori wood carving of the intermediate time or continuing youth of art. These are for the reader's

God is on his side, that his soldiers are invincible in battle, that might makes right. The first narrative art, depicting the union of Dictator and God, blood and divine destiny, is an apange of Imperialism.

To round out one's first impression of Babylonian-Assyrian art, one should read a stele commemorating the exploits of an Assyrian king of a millennium and a half later. It bears a relief showing King Esarhaddon, so large that his figure almost overflows the panel, with small gods in attendance. In his grasp are ropes ringed through the noses of two subjected kings who kneel, very shrunken and abject, in supplication. The inscription identifies the conquered ones as the kings of Egypt and of Tyre. The lesson is clear. The towering Monarch of Monarchs has subdued the outstanding rulers of the world. Only, historians now say, Esarhaddon never did succeed in subduing the king of Egypt, and in this stele he is merely boasting. From this the student may add one more item to the catalogue of psychological modernisms to be credited to those ancient kings: they had already fully developed a custom not unknown to imperialistic command in our own time—celebrate the victories, forget the defeats, claim everything. Nothing succeeds like a show of success. (Babylonian-Assyrian sculpture is the first artistic fruit of this spirit: typically realistic, propagandist and showy, a little empty, unspiritual, repetitive. The art of the world will be like that all down through history wherever the imperialistic philosophy prevails, whether the empire be Alexandrian, Roman, or Napoleonic. But, indeed, of all the art developed under the psychology of the militaristic conquering spirit, the Babylonian-Assyrian is the most engaging, best able to afford a distinctive pleasure by its mitigation of the violent event with a naive frankness and an intriguing realism.)

It is well that the story of civilized art begins chronologically with these practical, purposeful works of the peoples who settled on the banks of the Tigris and the Euphrates for they are more easily understandable than the almost contemporary Egyptian work, which is tinged with the mysteries of the spirit, and rich in abstract and formal qualities. Great art will have both values, of course, an inner one that grows out of imagination, vision, and inspirational handling of stone or paints or metal or clay, and an outer one gained from keen observation of nature and life. Egyptian art is supremely of the brooding inward creative man. Mesopotamian art is in general of the outward, observing, practical man. Thus the latter has closer affinity with European cultures and expressions. And the narrative reliefs that form so predominant a part of it, dealing with exploits of war and the hunt, with

kings and captives, with wounded or fleeing animals, with slaughter and revenge and plunder, afford a beginning point nearer to the emergence of the human race from savagery

The purposeful art of Babylonia and Assyria is the healthy product of the unashamed animal-man, the ruler by brute force. In it one recognizes a driving force very common in Western art—the successful adventurer and conqueror seeking self-glorification, setting up a record of his exploits, a warning to the weak and the envious, a gorgeous advertisement of his physical prowess. There is no mystery here, no effort spent on the subtle expression of vague mystic stirrings in the artist's soul.

There is no doubt from the evidence that here the artist goes into battle and the hunt at the king's side, that he observes victor and vanquished, hunter and hunted, and takes orders as to how he shall interpret, select, record. There is little time to invite the soul, little freedom for expanding the creative urge. He sets the happening down realistically and in a way that will glorify the king's name and ornament the king's walls.

He does not forget his birthright entirely. After all, at bottom he is still an artist, something more than mere recorder. He adds a modicum of composition, style, finished craftsmanship—else his works would not speak to us of today with a certain eloquence. To observed truth he adds a little expressive truth out of himself. Only, unlike Egyptian art, which lives strongly with an inward vitality brought up out of the depths of stone and the artist's plastic imaging sense, Assyrian-Babylonian sculpture has this inward vitality at almost its lowest vibration, while muscular life is shown at its most intense. It is literally the muscular man who is celebrated. The arms and legs swell with power, the shoulders are broad and strong. Even the gods are athletic, bull-necked, with bulging biceps and virile beards.)

Later the king-figure becomes stereotyped, invariably appears monumental among his pygmy followers, always wears the same fixed expression. Even the gods are more individualized. So are the little votive figures—though the religious things gradually go out during the twenty-five hundred years of Mesopotamian domination of the Near East. In the end the animals are the most human part of Assyrian art.

Of course, along with monumental expression there develops a more intimate body of works, graceful and delicate, and cut free from the necessity to illustrate and instruct. In the minor and useful arts and in miniature sculptures the design is often finely decorative, the craftsmanship expert, and



the object lastingly appealing. This is particularly true of the early or Sumerian period, when the sense of design is firm and the motives are fresh, before the artist's intention and integrity have been disciplined and therefore weakened.

The pageant of earliest civilized art unfolds against the geographical and historical backdrop of a single restricted part of the world in a small measure of time. The scene is the land touching upon the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, the time the centuries on either side of 3000 B.C.

The development of the cave art of the Reindeer Age is unexplained and perhaps always will be, and there is an unbridged gap between the widespread Neolithic art (of the Polished-Stone Age) and the first art products of civilly organized peoples, but we do know that the latter appeared earliest in Mesopotamia and Egypt, two fertile valleys separated by less than a thousand miles, with only the lands of Syria and Palestine between them. Taking them together as a single East Mediterranean region—and perhaps adding to them Persia and the adjoining Asiatic steppes—we have here the cradle of historic art. We can trace from these beginnings the motives, techniques, and styles which reached their maturity in the buildings and sculpture and minor arts of Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, and Egypt, and were diffused through bordering cultures to Greece and Rome and thus to all the West on the one hand, and to India and, less influentially, to the Far East on the other.

The relationship between the art of Mesopotamia and that of Egypt is indicated again and again in the unfoldment of three thousand years of their known history, but whether one preceded the other, whether it was the people of the Nile or of the Euphrates who "invented" conscious art expression as a part of maturing civilization and taught the other, is undecided. The weight of the evidence is a little in favour of Sumeria, a part of later Babylonia as the country of the earliest civilization. But one may begin the story in one valley or the other without seriously violating historical accuracy as we know it from the accepted records.

The findings from both regions, if they are of a period before 3200 B.C., are to be only tentatively dated, and enthusiastic archaeologists, loyal to the one or the other valley, make conflicting claims. Egypt will achieve a first-rate art much sooner than Mesopotamia and its art as a whole was destined to surpass that of the other, but both emerged almost at the same time, and



*Lamb Sculptured stone weight Babylonian  
[Courtesy Gallery of Fine Arts, Yale University]*

the Mesopotamian contribution is perhaps the more illuminating for the student—a better introduction to the “world stream”

At this time, when the peoples of Northern Africa and Western Asia were thus jointly giving the first impulse to the current of art, Europe still lay in Stone Age savagery and obscurity. Our forefathers there were “prehistoric,” without written language, without metals, without communal organization or organized warfare. Waves of cultural enlightenment and artistic invention will circle from the two fertile valleys, and from the lands between, until first the Aegean Isles and shores, then the body of Greece, and finally all of Europe are “civilized.” This we shall see graphically demonstrated with the spread of art. The question, why did conscious art and civilization first emerge where they did cannot be answered in terms of a single racial achieve-

ment: The pioneer civilized artists appeared among peoples who cannot be proved to have been racially pure. Prehistoric Egypt was probably a melting pot with ingredients from the Negro south and the Semite east as well as from the Berber peoples of the Libyan Coast, while in early Babylonian history, the Sumerians and Semites are almost equally evident, with problematic Indo-Iranian ('Aryan') elements pushing in from the north and the Aryan-speaking Persians from the east.

But if we accept the evidence that civilization began in this East Mediterranean area, it is fairly easy to see why of all the possible inhabited lands the two river valleys fostered invention and continuous aesthetic consciousness, why the chain of recorded human history began here. Settled life and the impulse to the arts came where men had lightened the heavy burdens of working and fighting. The two fertile valleys—the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia and the Fertile Ribbon that is Egypt—invited men to permanent occupation, won them away from nomadism and the insecurities of the hunting life, and led them to co-operative effort in irrigation and communal ordering of everyday existence. The face of the land, its rich soils, abundant waters, and nurturing sunshine, facilitated pastoral and agricultural development, encouraged group thinking and social organization, and afforded a margin of leisure above work which is essential to artistic creation.

Babylonia was the "garden eastward in Eden" planted by "the Lord God," blessed with abundant water and "every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food." Here men found that life could be made rich and easy. By group organization they could repel invaders. By the invention of a system of irrigation they actually did increase fertility until the grain seed yielded a two hundredfold and three hundredfold return to the sower, as Herodotus tells us.

Perhaps it was this marvellous fruitfulness, bringing men an unparalleled margin of leisure, that fostered the development of the two epochal inventions, craftwork in metal and a written language. Or perhaps it was because they had had the intelligence to work metals and invent a pictorial language that the dwellers in Eden also had the initiative to plan control of their river waters by canals and dikes. One way or the other the first civilized culture developed on the lower Euphrates. Here was the beginning of the chain of known art that reaches unbrokenly down to the Europe and Asia and America of five millenniums later.

It is well to hold clear in mind the geographical features of the land that



Sculptured diorite head-fragment of a Sumerian work, about 2500 B.C  
[Courtesy Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University]

cradled the culture of both East and West, to picture the Fertile Crescent as it arches over the Arabian Peninsula one end dipping southward down through Syria and Palestine toward Egypt, the other southeastward, its tip enclosing the silt-plains where the Tigris and the Euphrates mingle their waters at the edge of the Persian Gulf, and the centre embracing the main Assyrian valley between the two rivers as they flow south and east from the mountains of Armenia to the Gulf. Of the three rough divisions within the Crescent, the western portion enters only incidentally into early settled history, though the Syrians and Phœnicians will later take on civilization from their neighbours both east and south and become carriers of the crafts and skills. The central division, roughly Assyria, also is slow to catch up with the civilization of the more advanced Babylonians to the southward, and these in turn trace their finest institutions and arts back to a small section known, before its incorporation into the later Babylonian kingdom, as Sumeria. It is in the southeastern tip of the Crescent that history first appears.

Sumeria was an aggregate of city-states, on the Euphrates close to the Persian Gulf. The Sumerians are no longer supposed to have been the earliest inhabitants of the region, but rather "invaders," though it is still undecided whence they came and just whom they displaced. At the dawn of known history, they are dominant, giving their name to the section for many centuries to come, contributing the earliest and most lasting of the written languages of the region—the Sumerian pictograph writing being father to

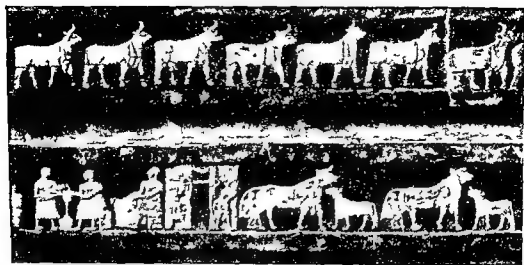
the cuneiform characters that are to spread over so much of the Near East, developing skills in the metals before their neighbours; using the wheel, and taking epochal steps forward in civil organization, warfare, law, and the arts. It is possible that they came from the Iranian Plateau to the East, bringing these accomplishments with them from some still undiscovered Persian or Scythian birthplace of culture.

Professor C. Leonard Woolley, who has done more than any other, as archaeologist and writer, to dig the Sumerians out of obscurity and place them prominently in the first episode of the pageant of human civilization, is willing to give them precedence over the once vaunted Akkadians or true Babylonians as founders of Asiatic civilization. He then goes further, to place them before the Egyptians, as pioneer law-givers, as inventors, and as artists. He points out that in the period when the communities of Sumeria were flourishing, say from 3500 B.C., Egypt still had no metals, had not invented or discovered the potter's wheel, and owned no written language.

As to the legendary origins of the Sumerian arts, Professor Woolley quotes a Babylonian named Berossus, of about 300 B.C., who stated that the towns of Sumeria were founded by a race of half-men, half-fish who came out of the Persian Gulf under the leadership of Oannes, and "all the things that make for the amelioration of life were bequeathed to men by Oannes, and since that time no further inventions have been made." And Berossus, in fact, mentions just those accomplishments which modern historians count most critical in the rise of man: agriculture, use of metals, and writing. It is likely that these advances developed together, in one push forward of the human intelligence, and the earliest datable evidences of them are found in Sumeria.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> That our knowledge of Sumeria and the earliest civilized art is subject to continuing revision is instanced in the findings of archaeologists during the period of preparation of this book. Excavations at Tepe Gawra in 1936-7 brought to light the foundation walls of a pre-Sumerian acropolis dated before 4000 B.C. and relics indicating that the Painted Pottery Peoples long considered primitive except in their mastery of the ceramic art enjoyed an advanced and balanced civilization. The evidence is offered of planned community building even of monumental architecture. The evidence is of pilasters of religious activities centred in temples of seals of the first datable gold beads these representing also the first worked metal of musical instruments of an earthenware jar bearing the first landscape painting—all ascribed to a time 500 years or more before the date previously accepted as marking the dawn of history and of civilized art. In other words Mesopotamian peoples who had been identified vaguely as of the Late Stone Age cultural level are now known to have had many of the attainments commonly accepted as pertaining to civilization. The excavators at Tepe Gawra sent out by the University of Pennsylvania in collaboration with the American School of Oriental Research had already over a period of years uncovered several world's oldest cities. They have expressed the hope of finding evidences of first settled or recognizably civilized man at levels to be dated 7000 or 7500 B.C.



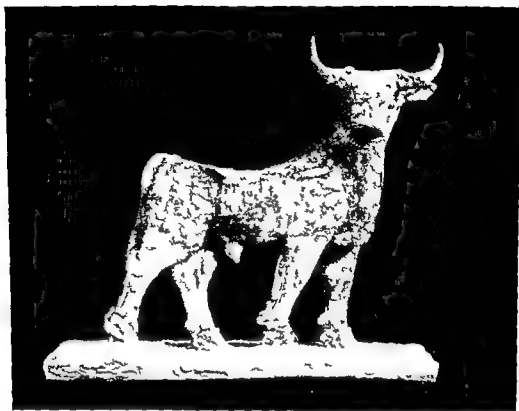
Two friezes from Sumerian building, about 3100 B C. From excavations of the joint expedition British Museum and University of Pennsylvania  
[Courtesy University Museum, Philadelphia]

The Stele of the Vultures mentioned at the chapter's opening choked with narrative action and devoted to a patriotic lesson, is an incident of late Sumerian art, but is less representative of the spirit of that art as a whole than of a strain that was to survive, by the chances of unfolding history, and to be expanded in the succeeding Babylonian and Assyrian developments. The rather sophisticated little animal figures, in the round or in low relief, the shell plaques and the seals are more in character as products of the early city-states' studios. From these one cannot doubt that the Sumerian contribution warrants consideration as a distinctive creative achievement. The spirit is in general more human and more ingratiating than anything in the later and larger cultures into which it was absorbed. There is more of frankly decorative art here and less of boastful and violent narrative, more ornament, more love of miniature refinement, and there are more animals—all typically Persian and Scythian rather than Mesopotamian traits. And curiously enough, there is in one phase of art in early Sumeria a degree of unforced realism, of fidelity to surface nature, not to be surpassed until Greek times. That is, in the centuries before 3000 B C. men are making statuettes and reliefs so characteristically 'lifelike' that not for twenty-five centuries will imitative skill go higher.

The art works that survive have to do mostly with gods and kings and upper-class personages. They are votive figures, reliefs commemorative of honours paid to the gods or celebrating the profane exploits of king and conqueror, and articles of luxury and show. Architecture yields up only ruins too fragmentary to warrant detailed speculation regarding the "looks" of monumental or domestic buildings, though it is a fact technically of great significance that the Sumerians were using rudimentary arches and vaults several centuries before 3000 B.C. (The common building material was the clay brick, since the country lacks both stone and wood in any abundance, and the architectural forms were doubtless plain and block-like, as befits brick construction.) The earliest feature of monumental building seems to have been the temple tower, perhaps an artificial substitute for the hilltop from which the gods had been worshipped, and thus may have been ancestor equally of Assyrian ziggurat, Moslem dome and minaret, and Christian campanile and steeple.

(Low-relief sculpture was freely used on building walls and in materials less heavy than stone as ornament on luxurious furniture, and the independent tablet-monuments, or stelæ gradually became common.) It is likely that the world's treasury of sculptured works from Sumeria will be greatly increased within the next few decades since only a few sites have been excavated—most importantly at Ur, Lagash, Eridu, Kish, and Nippur—but from the examples that have come to light, one can already form a picture of societies that delighted in refined workmanship in metals and stone and shell, and in colourful decoration and intricate pattern, and there are a few works that indicate a considerable sense of sheer plastic invention.

(The reliefs commonly known as early Sumerian—such as the Tablet of Ur-Nina—and doubtless made well before 3000 B.C., are generally marked by crudities not to be described as mere archaisms or as naive distortions for direct sculptural effect. They are rather downright inept and uncraftsman-like.) But the frieze of figures of men and animals once affixed to a wall of a temple at al'Ubaid near Ur, made of limestone reliefs set into darker stone panels, is uniquely effective and engagingly decorative.) The façade seems to have been extraordinarily enriched with various types of sculpture in addition to mosaic inlays. Remains have been found of several of the (limestone friezes, and there were extensive copper reliefs, including a large hammered panel over the door, depicting a lion-headed eagle and two stags, and a pictorial frieze in copper.) Around a ledge below these several relief features



Sheet copper bull originally shaped over wood about 3050 B C  
 [Courtesy University Museum Philadelphia]

was a row of oxen in the round made of beaten sheet copper over wood. The building is of the middle of the thirty-first century B C.

While monumental works of an earlier date are lacking, there is some indication that this art had been preceded by a long development of mature drawing and carving. The shell plaques attached to gameboards, musical instruments, and furniture afford evidence of exceptionally spirited patterning with figures at once characteristic and cunningly conventionalized for heraldic effect. Sometimes these are in carved low relief against a contrasting background. (There are also patterns made up of squares of shell with spirited linear designs engraved or incised. The lines were filled with a black or more commonly a red paste to make the drawing stand out clear and crisp by a process paralleled forty centuries later in European *mello* work.)

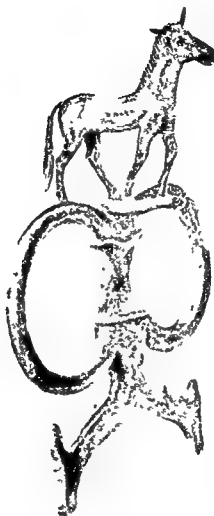
There are statues in the round of the true Sumerian period which evidence





Stone figure in attitude of adoration, Sumerian  
[E. de Sarzac: *Découvertes en Chaldée*]

an aptitude for the full-sculptural medium, although there is nothing that approaches the nobility and subtle æsthetic expressiveness of the Egyptians of the Old Kingdom. A priest in the attitude of adoration is one of the truly sculpturesque votive figures, with real "feeling for the stone," and without the later stiff formalization. But from the time of this unique statue of the thirty-first century down to the time of King Gudea, about the twenty-fifth century, there seems very little change in the conventions of the art, and certainly no great gain in mastery. (Some of the later full-length statues of King Gudea are massive, effectively simplified and reposeful.) But there is little of the inner sculptural life, of the plastic expressiveness, that so distinguishes contemporary rock-cutting along the Nile.



Mascot on rein-guide, from Queen Shub-ad's chariot, 3100 B.C.  
[C. L. Woolley. *The Development of Sumerian Art*]

It is rather in the field of figurines, and particularly when animals are dealt with, that a distinctive excellence is achieved. There is, for example, the figure of a donkey which Queen Shub-ad had attached as a mascot to the rein-guide on the yoke of her chariot—exactly as the proud motor-owner of today mounts a stylized device on the radiator cap of his car. It is a pretty bit of realistic sculpture, showing canny observation, but with due regard

The early examples may show roughly geometrical designs or solar images, and there are also primitive pictographic inscriptions. Certainly soon after 3500 B.C. the figured seals begin to show a considerable skill in relief picturing and a high sense of stylization. There is a sharpness, a crisp delineation of separated figures against uninvolved backgrounds, which perfectly belongs to this exquisite lapidary art.)

When the early Sumerian culture as such disappeared, a Semitic people known as the Akkadians, who had long been resident in the north, and indeed in Sumeria itself, prevailed for a time. They are supposed to have possessed a ruder art, and it may well be that they had taken the rudiments of their culture from the Sumerians, merely adapting in grosser form the refinements developed in the city-states of the south. At any rate, after a period during which the Akkadian-Babylonian and the Sumerian elements are very mixed—there is even a group of Sumerian kings with Akkadian names—there came a union of all the inhabitants from the Gulf of Persia to the city of Babylon, with extensions of domain northward over the Assyrians. Here begins the art more properly known as Babylonian.

Even earlier there had been halting attempts to consolidate the communities of the lower plains, and some temporary empires had been patched together. Sargon of Akkad had brought the Semitic element into power over the Sumerian about 2600 B.C., but there had been no great change in art. King Narani-Sin, third after Sargon, is memorialized in a stele which shows a great advance of realistic figure-delineation and modelling, in stone-cutting with many figures, and there are crumbled evidences of magnificent buildings during the Third Dynasty of Ur. But the differences are by no means epochal in significance, and the examples from this larger Sumerian culture seem less important than those of the early dynasties.

When the Semite King Hammurabi finally hammered one Babylonian empire out of the confusion of quarrelling racial groups, out of jealous city-states, each with its own rulers and gods, it was again Sumerian art rather than anything distinctively Babylonian that lived on. The city of Babylon now became the capital, giving a new name to the empire, and it was, according to existing records, adorned with palaces and temples magnificently conceived and decorated. Unfortunately later invasions, and the decay of Babylonian power before Hittite, Kassite, and finally Assyrian assaults, completely destroyed the architectural monuments. In 689 B.C., boasts King

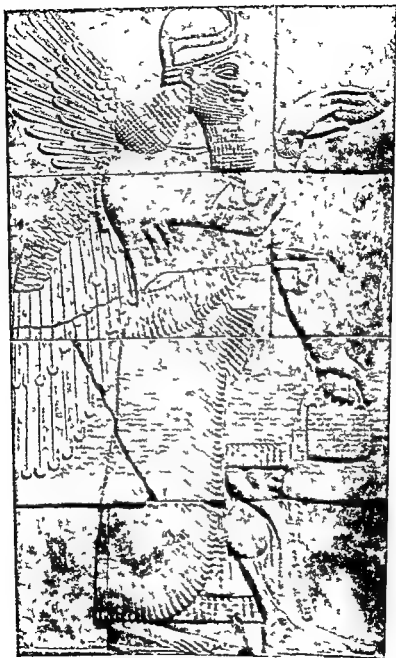


Mesopotamian seals

[Courtesy Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, and University Museum, Philadelphia]

Sennacherib of Assyria, he razed the city and inundated the ruins. Even the sculpture and minor relics of this period are scarce, and unimportant.

The stele containing the Code of Hammurabi, preserved because carried away by a Persian conqueror, is one of the most famous archaeological finds of modern times, but its value is primarily sociological. A rounded diorite shaft nearly eight feet in height is inscribed with thirty-six hundred lines of cuneiform text, setting forth the laws newly codified by Hammurabi for the just conduct of the people of his kingdom. Above the inscription the stele is adorned with a carved relief, showing the sun-god handing the code down to the king. The workmanship is good and the picturing uninvolved, and somehow the very simplicity of conception makes the work striking and memorable. It is infinitely better as art than, for instance, the ornamental flourishes with which the original of the American Declaration of Independence is framed at Washington, or the flabby realistic sculpture with which American and European official memorials are commonly embellished. The standard of official art was thus good, but not distinguished. The stele is, in its lack of subtlety or stylization, hardly more than a routine official



*Winged Figure* Stone relief from the wall of King Ashurnasirpal II's palace, 9th century B.C. [Courtesy Walters Art Gallery Baltimore]

work, showing no advance over average Sumerian sculpture, yet it is brightly competent and attractive considering the date, about 2100 B.C.

It is rather in some of the seals that the best evidence of continuing artistic sensibility exists. In summary it may be said that the two great periods of Mesopotamian art came before and after the Babylonian political supremacy, and that only the minor arts continued in richly expressive phases as a link between them.

Striking work does not reappear until leadership has passed to the Assyrians of the upper Mesopotamian Valley. The Semitic peoples there—origins unknown—had coalesced into something loosely national several centuries earlier, and had maintained their own character and to an extent their own institutions under Babylonian domination, while doubtless assimilating Babylonian-Sumerian cultural traits. Shortly after 1300 B.C. they were making a bid for the rule of the entire Mesopotamian Empire. It was, however, only after four more centuries of changing fortunes that, in 885 B.C., there came the dawn of the era of Assyrian imperial magnificence and expansion, inaugurated by Ashur-nasir-pal.

The magnificence and the glory were very militaristic, and we now have a wholehearted devotion to art concerned with conqueror-kings and wars and hunts. The heavenly deities, always a shifting galaxy in the ancient Near East, are re-arranged to bring a war-god to supreme position. Campaign follows campaign, under successive great monarchs—Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and finally Ashur-bani-pal—until even Egypt is conquered, and the exploits of each campaign must be recorded by court artists and scribes. More blood flows in this pictorial art than in any other in world history, and the triumphs of art itself have something of the coarseness and emptiness of worldly grandeur.

The epoch is summed up in the architectural splendours and sculptural adornments of the palaces of Sennacherib and Ashur-bani-pal at Nineveh. There are other works, to be sure—statues and vases and seals. Even the sculptured reliefs of the palace walls are more than a depiction of violent exploit. We can read in them of gardens and plants, of fishing, excursions, and feasts, of gods of love, of luxurious carpets and richly embroidered garments, and of women and children. There is here a mine of interest not only for the student of manners and customs but for the botanist and the ethnologist. In a depicted group of tribute-bearers the characteristics of each racial

or a sustained and vigorous style is more open to question. Certainly the winged bulls that he had such trouble with before he got them installed at his front gate were dull and lifeless enough. (Two similar ones, from the palace of Ashur-natsir-pal, now repose in the grand entry-hall of the Metropolitan Museum in New York.) And one suspects a very mixed effect in the interiors. They were colourful and showy, no doubt, with sculptured alabaster panels, glazed tile insets, painted stucco murals, and lots of furnishings set around. But the restorations of the archaeologists and the recovered fragments themselves will not convince the modern observer of the existence of a subtly designed ensemble or a distinctively beautiful "style."

The obsession with pain, torture, and conquest is illustrated particularly in the alabaster reliefs with which the brick walls were lined inside the main rooms. Some are of Sennacherib's time. The ones better known to the public are of Ashur-bani-pal's era, two reigns later. (The main series has long been exhibited in the British Museum.)

There is no reason to read sadism into these records of violence and suffering; they demonstrate rather the candid realism of rulers who lived by a philosophy of might-makes-right. The king has spread out a picture-book of his career as he would like his subjects to think of it. His predecessors had been depicted trampling their dead enemies or holding nets filled with severed heads. His artists will show more heads in his net and greater heaps of the slaughtered and trampled. It is a point of honour that they shall outdo all earlier chroniclers in setting forth the magnitude of his conquests. They conveniently forget any defeats and reverses—what patriotic artist does not?—and they exaggerate the numbers of the enemies slain or of lions killed. They convey the grisly lessons of war effectively and in detail. But it is when they come to depiction of animals in the hunt that they display deep emotional feeling, as well as a more sensitive hand in delineation. The human figure is almost without exception stiffly conventional, even wooden. But the animals are observed with a sort of cold sympathy and are superbly drawn. They are living, nobly strong, lithe. (Most lifelike of all are the hunted lions when they are wounded.) The artist has observed these dying beasts with a camera eye and has got down the salient and tell-tale facts, the drag of paralysed legs, the snarling jaws, the fury of the final leap. Today we cannot remember the prowess of the king dissociated from his cruelty, his disposition to boast of bloody slaughter. The lions run a straighter course to our admiration and pity.



*Wounded Lioness* Detail of relief from Ashur-bani-pal's palace *British Museum*  
[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

The merit here is, of course, one of realism. The reliefs touch a high spot in pictorial sculpture, but by no means one so high as the Victorian discoverers of the Nineveh treasures judged. The stone murals constitute a remarkable achievement, they tell stirring stories in an idiom ornamentally formalized if a bit heavy—with thrusts into compelling realism at intervals—but in general they lack the architectural unity of superlatively great sculpture.

Within a traditional formalization there is disturbing reversion to naturalistic imitation for its own sake. Every rosette on a costume is worked out minutely, every nail on the hand, all the reins from charioteer to horses, and every feather in a wing. Seldom did the placing of the figures on the background, or the grouping, approach the intuitive compositional sense long since displayed by Egyptian sculptors. Seldom did conventionalization embrace intuitive suppression of detail and non-essential for the sake of more

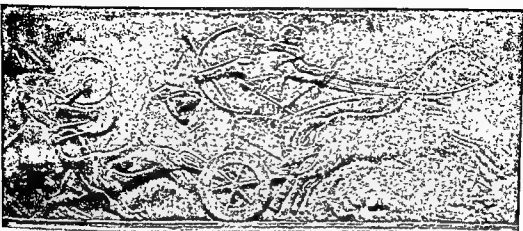


type can be recognized the Jews, for instance, show those striking facial traits that constitute a mark of the race to this day (The time of Sennacherib is the age of the prophecies of Isaiah) But in the subject-matter of the reliefs, war is first, hunting a good second, and the rest of life an incidental third

Sennacherib transformed the hamlet of Nineveh into the capital of an empire, possibly to avoid developed cities and elaborate palaces associated with earlier kings There he set out to build distinctively and gloriously in his own name There he erected for himself "the palace that has no rival," which was actually its official name

The palaces of the Assyrian kings were more than places of royal residence and imperial business Long before, the rulers had claimed divine sanction if not divine heritage the king was part god and directly related by function or birth to the supreme national deity So the temple was a wing of the palace, or perhaps its very heart But a wise and practical king did not leave too much of the business of foresight and protection to the gods The temple-palace was a fortress as well.

There must have been a striking difference in visual effect between the outside fortified walls and towers plain and grim, and the pomp and magnificence of decoration and life within A whole cityful of favoured people dwelt there nobles, defenders, favourites, politicians For the king's own quarters and those of his wives, the gods, and their priests, the appointments were sumptuous but the utilitarian outside brick walls were comparatively sheer and blank a combination to be noted often in later history, in Byzantine church, medieval keep, Florentine palace, and Spanish castle A ceremonial doorway brought the colourfulness and enrichment of the interior to the façade, in flanking sculpture and inset copper reliefs, and in narrow bands of glazed brick that continued out along the fortress walls The traditional architectural features are, in most particulars from the Sumerian by way of the Babylonian and the ritual ziggurat or tower dominates but the sentinel winged figures at the main entry are said to be of Hittite origin And of course there were luxurious embellishments from farther east. Already, too, there had been for long an interchange of art products with Egypt. All this the Assyrian monarchs brought into one focus, one show of art. It is likely that the designers and craftsmen were largely imported from surrounding countries Phoenicia and Syria and Egypt, each doing his part without a clear idea of the whole But the result was grand.



Hunting scene from King Ashur-natsir-pal's palace

[*Courtesy British Museum*]

King Sennacherib himself tells of his palace at Nineveh, in a tablet dictated to one of his scribes and translated in our own time at the British Museum: "Cedar, cypress, and pine, timbers from Sinai and thick bars of bronze, did I set in the doorways, and in the dwelling-rooms did I leave openings like lofty windows. Great statues of alabaster wearing crowns with thorns did I set on either side of the doorways . . . great winged bulls of white stone did I carve in the City of Tassiate beyond the Tigris for the great gates, and great trees did I cut from the neighbouring forests to build rafts on which to transport them. . . . With much effort and amid many difficulties were they brought to the gates of my palace." The temple portion of the building was especially sumptuous, being described by the king as "rooms of gold and silver, of crystal, alabaster, and ivory, built for the dwelling of my God."

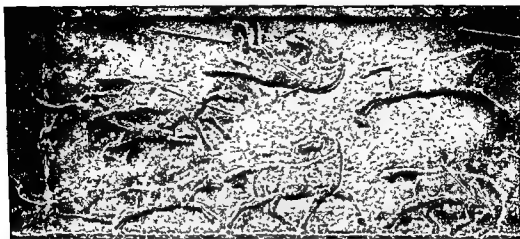
There is here, in the monarch planning dazzling outlays of architectural and decorative works, and in his arrogating to himself as imperial master the products of creative artists, a prototype of Hadrian and of Louis XIV. But if the "I" of his account is to be taken literally, Sennacherib did indeed have the born constructor's sense of sound engineering and inventive building; for he speaks familiarly of problems of lighting successfully met, in ways that dispel "the darkness of the old palaces," and of hydraulic inventions that brought running water into the building.

Whether he had the taste or artistic vision to weld this effort into a unity

intense plastic life, such as may be seen in the primitive work of a dozen peoples. The sculptural virtues are clouded by the purposes of ostentatious display and camera exactitude. We are made aware of the achievement of records as colossal and audacious as the kingly dictators could have desired. But we are seldom aware of the artist's living spirit transcending his commissions and his materials.

But perhaps it is enough of distinction that the great Assyrian imperialists thus generously subsidized artists: let them live, at the price of turning their art to the service of king and state, that thus early in the rise of human civilization those few men who exist for the expression of an inner vision and urge, sculptors, decorators, and poets, are permitted to continue at their work, no matter on what terms, beside priests, merchants, and soldiers. The point we have reached in history is still before the childhood of Greek art, which used to be counted the very cradle of serious æsthetic activity. And though we may feel disturbed at the thought of an art bound to dynastic purpose and a king's personal publicity, we know that it was as much a victim of established Babylonian-Assyrian tradition as of Ashur-bani-pal's selfishness. As a matter of fact there is other evidence of Ashur-bani-pal's genuine interest in the things of the mind. He took an epochal step forward when he gathered documents and books and established one of the earliest known libraries. The twenty-two thousand inscribed tablets, collected at his order to preserve accumulated knowledge in fields of religious tradition, scientific discovery, history, and general literature, and systematically catalogued, have been found in the ruins of the palace at Nineveh. Ashur-bani-pal himself makes a special point of the fact that as a prince he learned to read and write, in addition to the more noble arts of riding and hunting and—ruling.

After the fall of Assyria, which came about, the historians say, because conquest was carried too far, because too many men were taken from the farms and impressed into the army, until the home country was too weak for effective resistance, the ruling power passed southward again, to Babylon, now resurgent under another invading people, the Chaldeans. These were destined to rebuild the Mesopotamian empire, to dominate the Near East briefly, then to see their state collapse because the ruling class overreached the limits of safe exploitation. This downfall will mark the end of Babylonian-Assyrian independence, the last stand of the local Semites against a succession

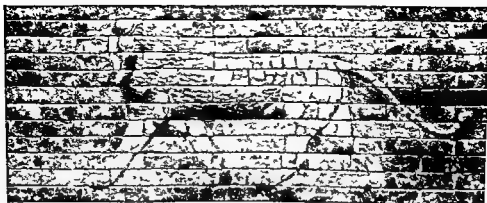


Hunting scene from King Ashur-bani-pal's palace  
[*Courtesy British Museum*]

of foreign overlords, beginning in 538 B.C. with submission to the Persians and continuing today in the British "mandate." In the records the Chaldean is sometimes known as the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

Here art is again summed up in the magnificent court of a ruler. In rebuilding Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar erected new temples to the ancient gods and constructed a palace of surpassing splendour. All the essential features of Assyrian monumental architecture seem to have been retained; it was the further push into luxuriousness and grandeur that gave Nebuchadnezzar's achievement distinction—and world-wide fame. The richly gardened terraces of the palace were the almost mythical "hanging gardens" which the Greeks counted one of the *Seven Wonders of the World*. And probably the temple tower, or an earlier one on its site, was the Biblical Tower of Babel. (It was Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed Jerusalem and carried the Hebrews into captivity in Babylonia.)

Today the art-lover and the student of archaeology have uncovered far more than legend to testify to the magnificence of the city constructed by Nebuchadnezzar. For the ruins have been searched, detailed drawings have been made of palace and temple, and the famous Ishtar Gate, which stood at the end of the Street of Parades, is set up in a Berlin museum. On the brick towers one may see the polychrome design, with animals carefully



*Lion* Glazed terra cotta relief from the Street of Parades, Babylon, about 570 B C  
 [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

depicted in high colouring. The effect is gay, the drawing is admirable, the craftsmanship is impeccably expert.

But sculpture has lost its structural relationship to architecture. Each figure is independent, and the items are merely added up in symmetrical rows. Plastic initiative has run out long before this. True formal creation has ceased. And as one looks back to the early Sumerian art that had developed a few miles to the southward nearly thirty centuries earlier, one feels that the mighty empires that succeeded to those tiny city-states added not a great deal to the progress of expression in art. Just as in the realm of civil organization the ideas of bigness, expansion, wealth, and power carried state after state into swollen empires certain to collapse—though indubitably advancing the quantitative sum of civilization—so the ideas of bigness, show, and luxury carried the arts into disunity and floridity. In comparison with anything found on the site of the new Babylon, the sculpture of Ur and Lagash is fresh and strong and formally rich.

The imperial art of both Assyria and Neo-Babylon, then, is at the sophisticated terminus of the long road, where men no longer see the work as a creative entity, as a single self-sufficient formal achievement, they lose the importance of the architectural whole, the plastic synthesis. They are diverted by marvellously imitated detail, by flourish and ostentation. This is the art of luxury, refined divertimento, court advertising, the type example of art as a record of spent civilization.

The Hebrews, a people puritanical and—in history—insensitive to the suavities of the visual arts, loathed the spuriousness of the show put on by this last Babylon. Saint John the Divine in the apocalyptic vision of the end of the world takes the city of Babylon as a symbol of all that is abandoned and iniquitous:

And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither, I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters

With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication

So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness, and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns

And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH

And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power

And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird

And the kings of earth, who have committed fornication, and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,

Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come

And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her, for no man buyeth their merchandise any more

The merchandise of gold and silver and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyme wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble,

And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.

And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all

The end, according to Daniel, came like this. One night in the year 539 B.C. Belshazzar, last king of Babylonia, "made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand Belshazzar, whiles he

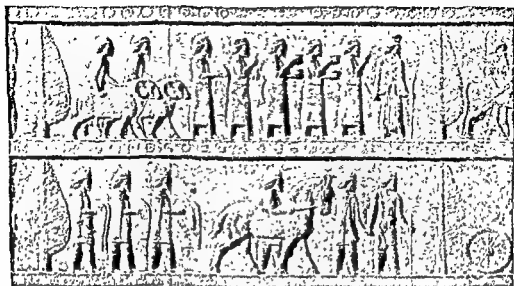
tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem, that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein "

But the royal guests drank not to the God whose temple had been despoiled. Instead they "praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone " In the same hour there appeared a hand writing on the wall, and Daniel read out the meaning to King Belshazzar "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting . Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians " That night "was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain And Darius the Median took the kingdom "

Where did these alien conquerors come from? Cyrus, who should be substituted for Darius in Daniel's account (and Nabonidus for Belshazzar), was the ruler over a small country and a comparative handful of people, whose ideal, said Herodotus, was "to ride and to shoot and to tell the truth " He conquered the Medes, blood-relatives of the Persians, the rich Lydians under King Croesus, and finally Babylonia before he died. His son Cambyses pushed out the bounds of the Empire until even Egypt was vassal. Under the later Darius the Great, the Persian Empire was the broadest of pre-Roman dominions.

Up to this time the Persians had had but meagre art of their own, compared with the Chaldean display. They now saw the gorgeous palaces and temples of their subject peoples, at Babylon and Nineveh and Thebes, and doubtless their hearts began to yearn for grandeur, for luxurious embellishment for extravagant and impressive Art.

There is an ancient record which tells how the materials of, and the artisans for, the palace at Susa were brought from a great many places from near-by Babylonia and Syria, from Lydia and Caria, from Egypt in Africa, and from Bactria up toward the Siberian steppes. The various stylistic features to be expected from the many collaborators can be found in the structures at Persepolis and Susa the first expressions of monumental art in Persia. The palaces are on the Babylonian scale and follow closely the terrace or platform plan. There is something of the Egyptian hypostyle hall in the audience-chambers. The sculptured murals point directly back to Assyria, both in their conception and in their shallow-relief technique, they are unmistakably in the line of descent from Ashur-nasir-pal's galleries of documentation.



Relief from the palace at Persepolis, Persia  
[Courtesy Oriental Institute, University of Chicago]

And yet there is a something new, a different atmosphere. The relief figures are better disposed, more expertly patterned on the backgrounds. Certainly there is less interest in naturalistic detail. Observed characteristics and familiar peculiarities are less insisted upon. There is a hint of an elegant formalism. The Assyrian-Babylonian descent into realism is stayed; the direction is reversed, toward formal and decorative ordering.

The columns of the audience-halls of the palaces at Persepolis and Susa were topped by capitals each carrying two kneeling oxen. The sculptured composition has values never seen in Mesopotamian work. Obviously a fresh spirit has come into sculpture. The animals are vigorous, graceful, alert, stylized. In the light of later work, this must be marked as typical Persian.

Just so does a new spirited vitality enter into the sentinel figures in the gateway of the palace at Persepolis. Studied as they obviously are from the standard Babylonian winged figures, they signalize a feeling for animal sculpture that was lost, perhaps, when the Assyrians took over the archetype from the Hittites. The Persians bring back something of the northern spirited manipulation of decorative elements.

A basic distinction in art methods is here made apparent. The Assyrians and Babylonians, in spite of an occasional wooden sort of conventionaliza-





*Ibex* Copper, Persian, Achæmenid period Collection Phyllis Ackerman  
[Courtesy American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology]

tion, leaned toward a realistic art that is akin to the Cretan and Mycenaean, the prototypes of the Græco-Roman or classic development. Persia, after sifting out the ingredients gathered up from captive peoples, turned in the opposite direction, toward an art decorative in intention, formalized in aspect, and rich in colour and incidental patterning. Whether the impulse may not have entered farther back, in a Scythian or Indo-Iranian reservoir of Aryan cultural beginnings, is a question to be considered in later chapters—since the evidence is to be found not in the land of origin but in a score of streams which seem to have flowed from it. One of its earliest manifestations, seen in the Luristan bronzes, is a part of the Persian background.

Unlike the large sculptured gate-monsters, and the architectural capitals, the polychrome glazed reliefs on the Susa palace walls are wholly Babylonian in feeling and aspect. The animals and the bowmen might have been drawn on the clay by the same hand that did the bulls and lions of the Ishtar Gate.



Iber. Part of bronze horse head, Scythian Iran or Turistan  
[C. 1st c. B.C. University Museum, Philadelphia]

In another direction—notably in the tomb of Cyrus at Pasargard'e—there is a foreign sobriety and restraint due no doubt to the Persian king's admiration for Greek culture. The building would indicate that Grecian architects had been imported. But this Western influence was destined like the Babylonian realism to disappear under what was soon to become a typical Oriental way of art.

If Persian culture at this time—that of the Achaemenids—the dynasty founded by Cyrus—was partly derivative, a foundation was quickly laid for one of the great distinctive art-styles of the future. Persia will have a long and noble history in the creative fields from the time of the next revival—the Sassanian—to the seventeenth century. Persian art will also father the Byzantine and the Moslem.

An art closely related to the Mesopotamian was developed by the Hittites



*Eagle Stone Hittite*

[*Courtesy University Museum Philadelphia*]

a people who lived to the northwestward of Assyria from Armenia over into Asia Minor. The monuments are few, and there are no indications that this was a settled centre of culture during the centuries when the Sumerian and Egyptian artists were shaping the earliest civilized bodies of art. The Hittites indeed entered into history during scarcely more than eight hundred years, but there is a distinctive style in the recovered Hittite sculptures. The formalization is firmer. The figures of the reliefs are squared. They fill their



*Lions Stone column base Hittite excavated near Antioch  
[Courtesy Oriental Institute, University of Chicago]*

spaces with better compositional effect. And the Hittite carver more easily suppressed naturalistic detail for the sake of strong sculptural unity. Coming after the Sumerian civilization, the neighbouring Hittite one borrowed institutions and arts, but kept its own native accent. It was probably refreshed from that source-land to the north whence were to spread the Iranian or Indo-Aryan influences.

In the lands to the south there are even more confused and indeterminate cultures. The Hittites were probably of a race related to the Aryan-speaking peoples. The Syrians, on the other hand, were Semitic, like the Assyrians who were their neighbours to the eastward, and the Hebrews to the south. But Syria and Palestine, as also Phœnicia, were on the highroads of commerce and culture, and subject to cross-currents of influence. And so it is no surprise to find their arts at one time reminiscent of the Babylonian, at another of the Mycenaean, with even occasional reminders of the distinctive expressiveness of Egypt.

In the twentieth century for the first time, archaeologists are systematically digging out the evidences of those borderland civilizations Phœnicia has left—as far as has been discovered—no art legacy so valuable as the intellectual one embodied in the alphabet handed down to Western nations, none so distinctive as the tradition of maritime invention and commercial exploration which made famous Sidon and Tyre Lydia is remembered for the invention of designed coinage The fixing of a value-relationship between gold and silver coins was appropriately an innovation of the gold-obsessed King Cræsus of Lydia Syria will enter into art history later as the cradle of Eastern Christian art, and again as a first centre of Moslem rule and culture, but leaves only secondary evidences out of the tune of Sumeria and of the Babylonian domination of the Near East. A few statuettes in museum collections are noteworthy They are votive offerings in copper, and perhaps among them are the world's earliest specimens of representation of the human figure in metal The isle of Cyprus will become a fusing bowl into which the Mycenæan, Ionian, and Babylonian streams will pour, and it will have a more or less distinctive sculptural art, and be in turn a source of influence on the Greeks

But all these threads are yet tangled. It is necessary to go back to the history of Egypt and of the Aegean civilizations before any lucid account is possible

## CHAPTER III



### *Pyramid, Statue, and Picture in Egypt*

WHAT is most characteristic about Egypt is its enduringness. Here the continuous record of man spans three times the age of the Christian civilization—but in nature nothing has changed: neither the ageless Nile, the unfailing flood and recession, the ever-present sun, nor the flanking deserts. Here Mother Earth broods, sustains, continues, and allows no interruption.

Twenty-six known dynasties of native kings had come and gone before Plato visited Egypt. Alexander and the Romans were episodes in a following lesser age, still before Christ was born in near-by Palestine. The Cross came, and centuries later gave way to the Crescent, but the Nile endured and the ancient Egyptian art endured, for the river and the desert, obscuring men and institutions, find their counterpart only in Egyptian art. In it too the rhythm is slow, ponderous, enduring. Where Western art is brilliant, nervous, staccato, Egyptian art is massive, silent, certain. The rock-cut tombs, the pyramids and the basalt statues, outlast empires. The sun still shines on pyramid, temple, domed mosque, and minaret, and the opened tombs reveal art as living, as compelling, as it was forty-five centuries ago.

On the map the Fertile Ribbon that is Egypt hangs like a fluttering pennant shaken from the lower corner of the Fertile Crescent of Mesopotamia and Syria. In all the world art came earliest to these two valley regions. The reason is the same. Civilization and culture develop where physical living has been made secure, where Nature has succoured man but has left just enough obstacles to challenge his wits, to enforce co-operation and self-discipline.

It all begins in the fertility of the soil. Before the arts can be conceived and born, men must live without too great hardship, be freed from too exhausting labour. The easy culture of the plough and the permanency of the hearth are indispensable preliminaries, and these the land of Egypt assured.

Egypt is an elongated oasis, a narrow strip of marvellously productive fields when watered, stretching for seven hundred miles between the parched Arabian and Libyan deserts. The strange circumstance of a thread of productive land between unproductive wastes not only eased the work of living but acted as a warrant of security in another way. There was no constant danger of attack from either flank, only the Mediterranean and Equatorial Africa at the two distant ends of the ribbon affording approach. Between wars the Egyptians enjoyed peace for centuries on end, a case almost unique in the history of man.

Isolation afforded institutions and art a stability and persistence never known in Chaldea and Assyria, or, later, in Persia, Greece, or Rome. Between the first dated kingdom and the Assyrian invasion, twenty-seven centuries later, the succession of native Egyptian kings was broken by only one interregnum of foreign domination. There was time for the slow gestation and development of a typically Egyptian art. Between the amazingly beautiful diorite statue of Khafre and the celebrated portraits of Ikhnaton and his queen, fifteen centuries rolled away. Within a shorter period the art of Greece was born, flowered, withered, was reborn in the show of Rome and again died.

When the race known as Egyptian is discovered to dated history, there is already a body of civilized customs and institutions, of skills and crafts. The Neolithic advance here has been one with that of Asia and Europe, and the archaeologists now exhibit undated weapons and pottery with all the characteristic Stone Age proportioning and ornamentation without refinement. When the curtain is really lifted, no one knows how many centuries later, yet forty centuries before Christ, there is already an advanced culture, with agricultural skills, picture writing, manufacture, navigation, and building in brick.

It is usual in dating events in Egyptian history to begin with 4241 B.C. A native historian of the third century B.C. left chronological tables figured to that year. It was then, perhaps, that the first calendar of 365 days was introduced for the first time the counting of years began.

The First Dynasty, which means merely the first *identified* house of rulers, reigned from about 3400 years before Christ. Then came what is termed the Old Kingdom, established about 2980 B.C. The latter was destined to last through the fall of six ruling houses and eight centuries and to include one

of the world's most fruitful periods of creative art, that in which the great pyramids and the most noble statues were produced

The Egyptologist finds it convenient to refer to the Old Kingdom as the golden age of art, and to note roughly two other peaks in the Middle Kingdom, from about 2000 B C, and in the New Kingdom, about 1370 B C. During the long decline thereafter will be found minor renaissances, before the typical Egyptian virtues are dissipated under Greek, then Roman, then Islamic domination.

Who were the Egyptian people? What was the racial make-up, what the character of this nation destined to create the first very great body of potent and immortal art? As we first come to know them, the Egyptians are described by ethnologists vaguely as part of a crystallizing Eastern Mediterranean civilization, with fused elements probably from lower (Negro) Africa, from the Semitic lands, and from the African Mediterranean coast (a Berber strain). The evidence is fragmentary and mixed: a Hamitic language, at least one typically Central African deity (a hippopotamus god) and the absence of physical characteristics clearly Semitic or Negro. The chances are that this nation was more than usually the result of the draining of diverse racial groups into a favoured land, and of their long intermingling.

The possibility of alien antecedents of Egyptian art is even more in the realm of misty speculation. Certainly the architecture is native, out of the soil and the local trees and stone. Elie Faure has offered with reserve the suggestion that the sculpture of Egypt is a true descendant of the prehistoric Negro idol, that thus, through the later diffusion of the arts of the Nile into Aegean, Greek, and Near Eastern lands, and so over all Europe and across Asia to China, the white and yellow artists derived some of the rhythmic and plastic sensitivity of the Negro.

Far too much has been written about death, fear, and morbid introspection as determining factors in Egyptian life and art. It is necessary, by way of correction, to emphasize the normal cheerfulness and love of gaiety in the native character. The thought of death did not lie like a pall over the comings and goings, the work and the play, of this essentially sunny people. It is true that gods, god-kings, and their priests ruled and demanded implicit obedience, every one believed that the more important part of existence came after death, the wise man made provision for a carrying over of the normal pleasures of life into that infinitely longer term, and the building that was constructed to last, to outwit accident and time, was the tomb, not the house or palace.



But even the sculptured reliefs and painted murals in the tombs often turn from religious and sombre subject-matter to record the lighter joys of living and when tomb offerings were sealed up with the body, they were intended not for propitiation of the gods but as an assurance that the deceased might be eternally surrounded with the good foods, the flowers, the arts, to which he had been happily accustomed on this earth

The evidence of the ancient Egyptian's cheerfulness, even lightheartedness, has come to light with the reading of thousands of routine and literary documents, and with fuller study of sculptured reliefs and mural paintings. Can any one surround with an atmosphere of gloom or obsessive piety the girl-poet who wrote for her lover "the beautiful and gladsome songs of thy sister, whom thy heart loves, as she walks in the fields"? Her daily work is the snaring of wild ducks in the marshes, but in love she forgets to set snares, and awkwardly frightens the birds

The wild duck scatter far, and now  
Again they light upon the bough  
And cry to their kind,  
Soon they gather in the sea—  
But unharmed I let them be  
For love has filled my mind

Once, "remembering the love-light in thine eyes" she opens the trap to let a bird escape. 'What will my angry mother say?' But she sings nonetheless

The late Arthur Weigall, most human of Egyptologists, has particularly stressed the lightheartedness of the dwellers early and late, in the Valley of the Nile. He quotes the love songs that are so like modern lyrics (the one above being paraphrased from his pages), and he insists upon the sunshine, laughter, and feasting, the pleasure pavilions and gardens and excursion boats. He notes that asceticism was unknown in Egypt before Christian times: forty centuries passed without its corrective or its blighting influence. Hathor and Bast, goddesses of pleasure—not in the spiritual sense of the word, the records indicate—were in the normal hierarchy of deities.

The mummies, the rock-cut tombs, and the Book of the Dead misled the first modern investigators. For the tombs and heaviest statues were the first to be dug up, and they survived in greater number because they had been fashioned to outlast eternity. So the Western world deduced that the Nile-dwellers were a sombre, funereal-minded, and puritanical people. Only



Seated Figure of Khephren, Dynasty about 2800 B.C. Cairo Museum  
 [Pl. 1, c. 105, Metropolitan Museum of Art]

exterior walls—can be traced back to primitive building with mud over tied-together palm sticks or papyrus reeds, or to the first brick construction along the Nile. The arch was early known and occasionally used. But of all this early activity we have only fragmentary evidence.

The pyramids, monuments unique and unforgettable, constitute the outstanding architectural achievement of the age. They rise from the desert like clusters of man-shaped mountains, mathematically severe, geometrically serene, looming up impressively. Their purpose was twofold. Each pyramid encloses far down in the mountainous solidity of the structure a tomb-chamber and connected rooms designed as the owner's home in the after life. The second purpose, naturally more evident in the pyramids of the kings, was to impress the living, to rear an inescapably imposing memorial.

The architectural virtues of the pyramids are all on the side of simplicity, largeness, and regularity. There is no ornament, no ranging of decorative columns, no elaboration of doorways, no enrichment of edges, only the naked four-sided erection, rising to take the sun, announcing to all beholders the uncompromising majesty of the god-king. There was nonetheless subtle planning and adjustment: the slope carefully studied, the mass calculated, to determine the exact triangle against the sky. Or so at least we must believe, since so many generations of wanderers in Egypt have been impressed. The pyramids speak, it may be, remotely, impersonally, overwhelmingly, but they live architecturally, they are alive with their own unique architectural vitality. Men are moved by them, vibrate to their elemental rhythm.

For those who are moved but ask if it is not a natural rather than an artistic effect that moves them, there can be only one answer: art is what man contrives, and no one is competent to say that what is contrived intricately, with the refinements of late cultural decoration and ornamentation, is superior, as art, to that which remains close to basic forms: nakedly impressive. The pyramids may move men primarily as mass—as weight—as unbroken upward thrust—and as much might be said of Mont Blanc or Mount Rainier, but the precision and the calculated proportioning and balance are notable, too, and mark the pile as artificial, as a new creation, outside nature, with definite artistic intent—by which the observer fifty centuries later is thrilled just as were the subjects of Khufu or of Khafre, the kings who reared the monuments.

A school of thought has arisen which ascribes mystical significance to the form of the great pyramids. Throughout art, the argument goes, the æsthetic



*The Pyramids* Lithograph by Louis Haghe after David Roberts  
[G Croly *The Holy Land*]

response is partly to a calculated order within the painting, statue, or building. The artist is inspired, beyond all matters of subject and use, to fix in each of his works an echo of the rhythm or continuing order of the universe, a revelation of the ultimate balance and repose of the cosmos. As creator he works in the stuff of the spinning spheres, the heavenly axes and tensions and orbital paths. He intuitively designs a new world bespeaking cosmic principles.

Well, the pyramids, the mystics say, exhibit the most amazing correspondences and relationships in the measurements of line and area, of weight and mass. No one, to be sure, has been able to unravel the mystery of just how certain mathematical visual relationships, certain geometrical hidden figures, call forth a pleasurable or ecstatic response in the human soul, in the deep region beyond sense and brain, affording satisfaction, a consciousness of unity with the source of creation. There is no formula for plastic creation. Suffice it to say that the pyramids have this deep-cutting original rightness. They are geometric, musical, for music, the least literal and least intellectually explainable of the arts, the most elusive and most unaccountably moving, is also the most exactly mathematical.

Behind the sheer aesthetic and monumental effect there comes trailing the intellectual curiosity, the inevitable question of how—by what method was

later did the bright jewellery, the decorated beds, the down cushions, the love poems, the lip rouge, and the eye-tint come to notice, and the colourful murals picturing hunters and musicians and dancers, flowers and fruits. Doubtless any list of the major and profound works of Egyptian art must begin with the pyramids, the granite and diorite statues, and the sculptured tomb-walls. But there are too the everyday art of sensuously insinuating decoration, a range of lovingly shaped wine jars and perfume boxes, and felicitous and colourful pictures of daily life.

There is reason to believe that, if the collective Egyptian mind occasionally dwelt on the long sleep of death, it came the quicker to a familiar conclusion that one does well to spend the waking hours of today in the more attainable groves of happiness, with a reasonable regard to the pleasures of the senses. There seems to have been about the usual proportion between innocent heart-freeing diversion and excessive indulgence in drunkenness and sensuality, while the priests assumed the main burden of philosophic thinking.

'Tombs' is not just the word for the structures in which so much of Egyptian art has been brought to light. Within the protecting pyramid or mastaba, which may appear forbidding because lacking in exterior colour or ornamentation, there is likely to be a series of rooms more like a livable villa in furnishings and decorations. Within this the mummy may best be thought of as a man nicely wrapped up for his next long journey and sweetened with gums, spices, and perfumes. When you dig him up, thirty centuries later, you will likely still find the flowers around him, and bowls of fruit, and jewellery and reminders of dancing girls and jaunts up the river.

Religious faith has always been a powerful determinant of artistic expression, and loyalty to kings is only second in influence. Temple, cathedral, palace, and tomb, idol and royal portrait, the picturing of religious legendry and of courtly pageantry and diversion—take these from the body of world art and only a fragment of the treasure of the past remains. Egypt had no more than its fair share of likenesses of god and priest, of king and noble, and its quota of temples and crypts.

The gods are many in Egypt, and not so very awe-inspiring or austere if one obeys implicitly and does not forget the priests in harvest month or on pay-day. There is, indeed, a nice balance of the aloof and the familiar, of a mystery commanding respect with human and animal attributes that are understandable and likeable. For worship the sun-god is supreme, and this may be the Nile-god, too. The sun and the Nile are the two obvious, familiar,

and never-changing facts of the geographical environment. To them, personified, must be addressed the respect, the propitiation, the thanks, that are bound up in religious sentiment. No less the well-known animals, once tribal totems or personal fetishes perhaps, they have become associated with specific god-ideas. The cow and the jackal, the serpent and the hawk, the lion and the goat—the deity is imagined in the guise of one of these.

This animal idolatry is notable particularly for those who believe that art is a continually changing venture into formalized expression continually renewed out of understanding and love of nature. Even if the artist were forced by a priesthood to serve gods alone, here would be a treasure house of familiar and beloved models ready to his hand. If his aptitude for reproducing the characteristic appearance of lion or bull were reinforced by a burning faith in a hidden god-aspect of the animal, by a desire to image it in a larger significance, as symbolizing the order and rhythm at the heart of the world, might he not the better transcend mere reproduction, mere portraiture, and rise to art as creation, as revelation? Might he not thus come to express the insinuating intimate reality of the animal as seen, as known in daily life, and add the divine implication, the artist's subjective contribution?

It is thus that Egyptian art is to be viewed and enjoyed: it is so amazingly true to model and attitude, with masterly freedom from over-picturing, with selectiveness, and yet so true to inner vision.

The temples of the Old Kingdom period have lapsed into ruin. Of architecture there is practically nothing left from the golden age except the pyramids. These are monuments enough to any civilization perhaps, and it is significant that the tombs of kings, rather than the houses of the gods, should have claimed men's most enduring expression in the building art. Certain temple sites and ruins have been excavated, particularly in the pyramid and other burial-ground areas, and considerable information has been amassed as to how the early Egyptians built, but there is little to engage the eye as surviving architectural composition.

The temples of the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties, the very height of the Old Kingdom's flowering and the period of surpassingly great sculpture, seem to have been severely geometrical, heavy, scarcely ornamented at all. Toward the end of this period the squared granite pillars became less severe columns with palm-like forms or added lotus-bud capitals. Most of the conventional language of the building art—ornament, overhang, slight inward slope of

this stupendous engineering feat accomplished? The great pyramid, that of Khufu, in the group at Gizeh which was one of the Seven Wonders of the World in Greek times covers an area of thirteen acres. Each side is about 755 feet long at the base-line. The stone in the practically solid structure totals more than three million cubic yards. This colossal structure, in which the average single stone block weighs two and one-half tons, was erected without modern lifting machinery. But engineers have shown how with an equipment of ramps, wedges, and other elementary devices the task could be accomplished, granted armies of human workmen. The Greek historian Herodotus recorded the legend that one hundred thousand men were occupied twenty years in the erection of the Great Pyramid. These were, of course, slaves.

Today the exterior of the Great Pyramid is comparatively rough and unfinished, but once it was resplendent in a perfectly fitted and polished shell of limestone. This coating was removed in the course of the ages as builders in near-by Cairo needed and helped themselves to the nicely polished blocks of stone for use in such alien structures as mosques and monasteries and tourist hotels.

The pyramids are logical outgrowths of the primitive Egyptian's common tomb-under-a heap-of-sand. The sand-pile was enlarged and the top flattened. Then more enduring materials were utilized, and the tomb-house became a raised terrace, still with sloping sides and flat top—a *mastaba*, as the Arabic has it, from a word meaning "bench." Finally a king had mastabas piled on each other, in diminishing size, thus arriving at the step pyramid. And so, from its general form, the true pyramid.

But the interior chambers were not enlarged to match. The great pyramids are almost solid rock, the space given to rooms and passages constituting a small fraction of the total volume.

Sculpture is the art pre-eminent among those immortalized in this cradle of the monumental arts, during the Egyptian Old Kingdom. It was, remember, three thousand years before those Greeks who only yesterday were accounted the supreme sculptors of the "ancient" world.

The celebrated Sphinx of Gizeh is significant in that a Pharaoh and his architects could conceive and execute a statue of such colossal scale and in artistic relationship to near-by pyramid and temple. With its architectural invention escapes the limitations of a single building and deals with the plan and



*Portrait of a King Petrified wood, 18th Dynasty Cairo Museum  
[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*



appearance of a considerable area—a reach forward to a super-architecture that has hardly yet matured in our Western milieu, and then in an almost exclusively theoretical way—in city planning and “idealistic” community planning.

The Sphinx could not have moved so many observers to exclamations of wonder and delight if it did not possess genuine sculptural merits in addition to its imposing size and the novel use of a natural stone outcropping for its material mass. It dominates its desert and fits perfectly with the magnitude of the pyramids.

The much-remarked enigmatic expression is partly, no doubt, an accident of time, and the use of it as a symbol of inscrutability is a matter of secondary importance in any case, a literary or intellectual addition. But it is likely that the original unravaged monument partook generously of that true sculptural proportioning, that calculated massing of volumes which is the key virtue of the art. Something of this essential sculptural effectiveness remains even today, after “restorers” have added their mutilations to those of time.

The Sphinx also expresses kingly aloofness and imperiousness. He is the watcher, looking over common men's heads, the king-god who drew his power and his distinction from divine communion beyond the earthly world. The visitor today *feels* this sense of kingliness added by the sculptor's power to visualize and give symbolic form to inner characteristics. The portrait head on the lion body was a convention of the time, one of many conventions by which the artist might impress the popular mind with the divinity and majesty of the ruler.

Fortunately there are lesser monuments of the same reign that have survived intact. Not of the same exceptional physical dimensions, they yet breathe the sense of largeness, massive order, and noble proportioning which is of the very essence of stone sculpture. Of this sort is the diorite statue of Khafre, who was also the king-builder of the Sphinx. Diorite is one of the most intractable of stones, and modern sculptors have expressed amazement that so finished a monument could have been chiselled and ground out of so flint like a material. But there is no faintest lack of mastery here. The *Khafre* is supremely craftsmanlike, even while supremely living.

What is it in this work that moves us, that yields five thousand years after its making, the warming pleasure of the sculptural experience? Even as we respond, we know not how or why, to the abstract order and measured rhythm of the stone, we delight in the truth and depth and feeling of the



*Seated Figure of King Khafre Detail Cairo Museum  
[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

portraiture Here is a king of ancient Egypt The man is before us in every feature, every telling lineament Not the individual man unsupported, but the individual inspired, become superman The god-king idea is fused with the individual identity, determines attitude and expression, gives largeness and a true grandeur to frame and bulk and stature The god in this case is also symbolically in attendance is visually bound up in the head-dress a part of the physical synthesis This is the man king-god in one representation, one breathing entity

But the lifelikeness of a man, his character and endowments, does not alone make great art If it did our contemporary photographic portraiture would be on a level with the Egyptian masterpieces The greater miracle lies in the typical sculptural achievement Fixing of the life of the model is never enough. There is an inner artistic vitality, born of creative use of the medium,

which meets and matches outward observation and psychological understanding. It is the greater wonder in these Old Kingdom statues that they live with an amazing sculptural life.

The sense of nobility conveyed is but half of the king, the other half is the sculptural medium nobly used. Stone lends itself, in a master's hand, to the expression of organic order, characterful solidity, immobile calm. Half of what we feel, intuitively, in our enjoyment of Egyptian sculpture, is the quality of the stone multiplied, concentrated, revealed. The integrity of the block of granite remains, strong movement is confined, its power is revealed.

By no means are all the multitudinous statues of the Old Kingdom equally alive and potent. The conventions of sculptured portraiture had been fixed long before—a few hardly changing attitudes, an arrangement only slightly asymmetrical, a standardized body with only the face subject to true portrait treatment. This setting of rules and types resulted in a great amount of inferior routine statue making, with artistic potency as a secondary consideration. Often the sculptural formalization has degenerated to meaningless rigidity and empty rhetoric. The kingliness has become a formula, unvaried from good Pharaoh to bad, from one family of routine sculptors to another.

The statue of this early period, to be sure, never degenerates into over-elaboration or laboured delineation of natural detail. It is, in general, large and broad, but in its inferior forms it lacks the sensitive adjustment, the plastic aliveness, the inner vision. There are, however, figures that approach the Khafre in nobility and subtlety. Some are in stone, some in wood, and still within the golden age the first metal statues appear.

Perhaps the most stirring sculptural conception in wood preserved from the pre-Buddhist civilization is the statue known as the *Shekh El-Bled* or the *Village Magistrate*. It is impossible to tell how far the wood may have gained, in grain and finish, in the fifty centuries during which it kept its vigil in a tomb. During that period it lost—mercifully it must seem to us now—a coat of paint. In any case the "effect" seems absolutely right. The solidity, the architectonic structure, and the reposeful and powerful bearing seem perfectly calculated, masterfully achieved.

Again the lifelikeness is twofold—true to individual character and station, and intensely of the medium. The man lives again in essence, and then doubly so because of the formal vitality of the sculpture as such. As a matter of fact the portrait is so true to type, a self-satisfied "official" type persisting till today, that the native workers who dug up the piece under the direction of



The Village Magistrate Wood 5th Dynasty Cairo Museum  
[Photography Metropoli Museum of Art]

archæologists, exclaimed immediately "The village magistrate", and so it has been known ever since by the name of the local Shekh, El-Beled. Thus is great art, often, particularized expression in language universally recognizable. The literal mind sees in the artistic generalization a particular known appearance or identity. The observer trained to æsthetic enjoyment finds the particular a bridge to the regions of a profound order, of spiritual satisfaction.

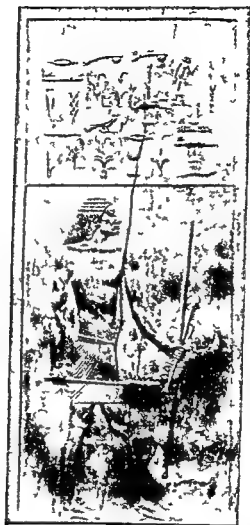
It would be possible, doubtless, to trace a tendency to individual freedom of expression through the course of the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties, which mark the summit of the Old Kingdom's artistic achievement. But it is of the essence of the matter, if one is to *enjoy* Egyptian sculpture, that one recognize first the combination of virtues of truth to individual model, psychological understanding of what the subject stands for, and masterly sculptural expressiveness. To illustrate this synthesis, three or four examples will serve as well as twenty.

It is easy to note, and find a slightly different pleasure in, the increased natural lifelikeness and alertness of the best known of the early metal statues, the *King Pepi I and His Son* in the Cairo Museum, or the father-and-son group in wood in the Louvre. In the common family groups of man and wife, or man, wife, and children, there is a drift toward sentiment, despite the maintenance of the traditional rigid frontal attitude. There is something touching about the wisely hand that commonly reaches across to rest upon the stiffened arm of the spouse and master.

Despite the rigidity of the body and the enforced convention of a few set attitudes, the faces in early Egyptian sculpture are widely varied. If the conventions were ordained and enforced, as we must believe, by the ruling powers, priestly and kingly, no less was the individualism of portraiture a result of belief and custom. When the statue was not intended to impress the populace, it was designed to stand in a tomb as the double of a man, some say to take his place when the mummy decayed, others that the statue represented the double that walked with him in life, his personality. The Egyptians had noticed, no doubt, that the mummified figure shrank, changed in looks, was no longer, after the wear of years, the true man in aspect. And if the gods should mistake the identity of the tomb occupant, all the delicacies and furnishings intended for his use in the long after-life might be diverted to the delectation of another. No amount of labelling would serve so well as a statue, an exact image of the individual man as he appeared in life, a crystallization of his personal characteristics.



Portrait statue wood 6th Dynasty Gizeh  
[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts Boston]



Shallow relief portrait panel known as *The Relief of Henre Wood*, 3rd Dynasty, Sakkara Cairo Museum [Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

In any case here, almost at the birth of monumental sculpture, portraiture came to a noble blending of individualism and idealization seldom approached in later ages. The likeness may be curbed for greater plastic expressiveness, the features summarized, the head mired or swathed to give mass. But the face can be accepted only as the very essence of the man who sat to the

sculptor Comparisons of statues of the same king or noble permit no other deduction Khafre is always recognizable as Khafre once you have met one of his likenesses

To the solid rocklike statues the wall-reliefs afford a striking and pleasing contrast, but within the limits of great sculpture The inside stone walls of the rooms in the mastabas of kings and nobles were worked over with shallow sculptured relief-pictures and fitted-in hieroglyphics The reliefs were tinted after the cutting The effect is rich and engaging and charming beyond any other display of large-surface low-relief in history

Ti was head builder of the royal pyramids under King Khafre and therefore something of a figure in the art affairs and social life of his time Today we know his every physical characteristic and not a little of his inner character from the portrait statue found in his tomb at Sakkara But the more extraordinary and likeable art linked with his name is in the series of tinted reliefs on the walls of his home-for-the-ages a tomb very untomblike in the colourfulness, freshness, and range of subject-matter of the picturing and in the lightness of touch of the unknown artists

Without ever departing from the conventions of low-relief sculpture, from the technique of almost flattened volume, linear rhythm, and sweetly undulating planes, the sculptors fixed in continuous panels an amazing range of scenes from contemporary luxurious life The workmanship and aesthetic potency of the relief-pictures are so masterly, so uniformly excellent, that they rank with the greatest murals of all ages At the same time the natural truth, the observed detail, is so exact that scientists can name every bird, every flower, and can even point out the slave with adenoids and the tribute-bearer who came from Ethiopia

Since the Egyptian believed that what was on the walls of his tomb would be enjoyed for ever in the after-life, there was reason to crowd in every pleasurable activity experienced on earth, in his household his recreations, his arts, his travels, his profession, and particularly in his observation of the birds and beasts and flowers around him Ti's farm slaves are shown ploughing, sowing, harvesting, threshing The fish are caught for his dinner, or the cattle slaughtered and quartered The boats of the Nile are seen, the bird-trappers at work in the marshes, the hunters dispatching their quarry, the milking and herding, the keeping of accounts, the exploits of war Musicians play and slender slave-girls dance while the master's wives are bathed and



powdered But it is perhaps animals that most of all live with a lifelikeness that betokens long and loving observation and fellowship suave cats and waddling ducks, geese, ibises, donkeys, and antelopes

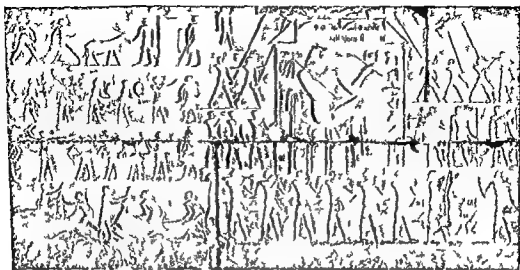
To have disengaged these subjects so simply from the casual profusion of nature and life, to have rendered them so freshly, rhythmically, strongly, to have brought appearance-validity so docilely within the confines of stone-picturing, of cut line and shallow relief, is a miracle one more indication that here sculpture leapt almost at once to a world peak.

A sort of childlike poetic attitude toward life is indelibly fixed here, beginning with the naive faith that the companions, pursuits, and pleasures of the tomb-occupant will be with him for ever because the pictures are with him, and again in the fresh simplicity of observation, feeling, and re-creation Notable are the linear harmonies, the toylke profile figures, the illusion of a complete scene, a complete world, given without detail, without light and shade, but with joy at once of living and of picturing Here is exceptional contagious vitality, without insistent naturalism or thought-out documentation The development marks a summit of "light" art the felicitous expression of a world delighted in, fixed easily, with the transparent formalism of that eternal child-time of man which sees incompletely perhaps, but intuitively gets down the facts in which the observer will find himself irresistibly participating

In comparison with them the celebrated bas-reliefs of the European Renaissance are, with some exceptions, a vulgar display of scientific knowledge, anatomical exactness, or mechanical perspective These later things are prigishly sure of their rightness, and are not a little sweetened The Egyptian reliefs are instinct with emotion, sentiment

The Egyptian relief-murals and painted murals form a pageant illustrative of the ways of life in engaging art that is scarcely to be equalled in any later civilization The one similarly complete and aesthetically valid record is perhaps Hokusai's *Mangwa*

The naïve conventions of Old Kingdom relief-cutting distress some observers They want the artists of the Nile to have known "scientific" truth, that is, the conventions of the camera-eye. They find the lack of background vistas, particularly of perspective, a denial of their own scientifically bolstered image of nature Especially they are annoyed because, while the cat or the duck is perfectly and "truthfully" suggested, the man near by is drawn with face and feet in profile, and shoulders full front.



Relief from a tomb at Sakkara 6th Dynasty Cairo Museum

From the start the wall sculptors and painters had perpetuated certain primitive conventions. Before logic and intellectualization ruled, early artists depicted the features of nature as commonly known, not as seen in one moment of time in a particularized attitude. For the most part men and animals were reproduced in profile. This was what most vividly impressed the retina and became stored in the memory. But an eye was shown full front—an oval with a round pupil. When an eye was put into a profile head it was not the profile eye but the remembered full front eye. And when figures began to be drawn *en face* (and the shoulders were always so shown) the feet were left in profile. This is the most characteristic and the traditional view.

As the realists of later ages began to intellectualize over art, to ask if the picture were logically true, the European critics fell upon these conventions, marked them as *gaucheries*, and spoiled primitive and Egyptian art for millions of observers. Today, as the freeing winds of expressionism blow over the Western world, some of the primitive distortions are seen as artistically right—or perhaps as merely unimportant. Certainly a few out-of-place eyes and turned-around feet no longer divert the contemplative eye from the fine total decorative effect of the Egyptian murals. It is discovered that from the absolute photographic point of view, all art is a convention. How far the artist strays from camera truth is inconsequential so long as a vital artistic

organism, a new æsthetic entity, is created and made to live in its own plastic and decorative completeness

Another convention is common to wall-reliefs and many free-standing groups of statues. *The king is very much larger than his subjects*, and the master of the house (or of the tomb) is depicted as a giant among his associates—slaves, wives, pets, and other household paraphernalia. The wife will bulk larger than the servants, but is a mere circumstance to the man.

The painting of the Old Kingdom is not of the importance of the sculpture and the architecture. It is, indeed, not often to be dissociated from sculptured relief. After the decline of the Old Kingdom there is a long period of darkened history and not much notable art of any sort.

Such vast stretches of time are included in Egyptian history that, in order to make clear any sort of unity, and to avoid confusing reservations and wandering in side-channels, one must skim over periods of many centuries, which under any other civilization would perhaps be considered as celebrated "ages." Thus almost a millennium is allowed to elapse, after the flowering of art in the Old Kingdom, before the curtain is again rung up, on what is in effect a renaissance. It is now the time known to historians as of the Middle Kingdom, beginning about the twenty-second century B.C. The Egyptian capital has been moved up the Nile to Thebes. An attempt is being made to recapture the glories of the Old Kingdom's artistry. In sculpture the artists never quite arrive at the miraculous synthesis, though their statues would stand out as impressive in many another age. On the other hand, architecture becomes more important and more broadly expressive—the Old Kingdom had left nothing more than the pyramids.

The temples of the Theban builders rose to larger importance than their tombs, though often the temple was still an adjunct of the sepulchre cut in a rock cliff. West of the city of Thebes, on the cliffs of the desert's edge, there were constructed so many royal sepulchres that the area is known as the Valley of the Royal Tombs. This is the famous "Necropolis" or city of the dead, at Abydos. The one-time pyramid-chapel is now commonly built near the Nile banks below the cliffs and adjoining the town, so that the builder may have convenient access to his patron-god during his lifetime, and his survivors may conveniently bring offerings in his honour, and perhaps replenish his supplies, after his death.

Among the royal tombs recently excavated in the valley, the best known



*Queen Hatshepsut Limestone 18th Dynasty*  
*[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

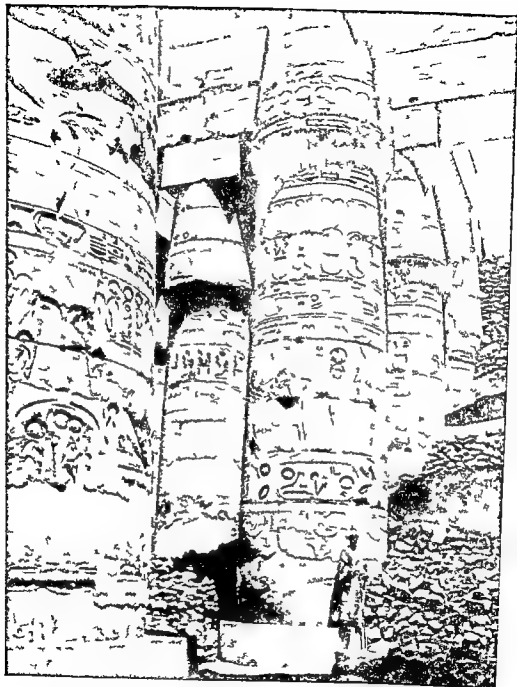
date back to the New rather than the Middle Kingdom. Outstanding in popular interest is that of Tutankhamon. But foremost among the cliff-edge temples is that of Queen Hatshepsut, of which the remains are sufficiently intact to impress visitors to the site today. Despite its New Kingdom date it is probably a reversion to Middle Kingdom types, and the archaeologists' chief evidence of forms in that time.

The architecture is more serene, more restrained, and many will say more beautiful than the contemporary and later temples which are more often paraded as typically Egyptian. There is an aspect nearer to early Greek sober building, with no exuberance in flowered capitals and columns traced all over. There is refinement in the simple polygonal pillars, and restraint in the simple terraced repetition of court and colonnade, as there is also a thoughtful fitness of temple to towering and protecting arc-cliff behind.

If the outward effect seems somewhat cold and over-formal today, it is to be remembered that sculpture and trees may once have given a grace now lacking. It was approached by an avenue lined with sphinxes, and doubtless innumerable incidental statues. The queen herself had it recorded on the inner walls, in both words and picture reliefs, that the gardens were luxurious and exotic. She sent an expedition to distant Punt on the Gulf of Aden, "the land of incense," and to this day we can see a graphic representation of slaves loading the boats there with trees and bundles of spices and other valuable cargo—even cows and monkeys. The royal lady had her artist-scribes set down full descriptions in the captions. An oracle of Amon had commanded her "to establish Punt for him in his house, to plant the trees of God's-Land beside his temple in his garden." And so, the muralists record, "it was done."

It is rather the temples of Amon at Karnak and Luxor, both situated in the Theban area, that are the full-blown show pieces of middle and late temple building and, indeed, of all Egyptian architecture aside from the pyramids—enormous erections built progressively through many dynasties. The fat, closely spaced columns, profusely decorated, with capitals elaborated out of the early lotus-bud and papyrus motives, the massive pylon-gates, the incredibly rich tracing-over of every plane surface with reliefs and inscriptions, and above all, the colossal size of the monuments—these characteristics have made for a powerful impression upon visitors from the outside world through all recorded ages.

The size of the Karnak temple is so great that the central ceremonial hall alone could be fitted down neatly over Notre Dame Cathedral. Never since



Columns Temple of Amon Karnak  
[Photo courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

has the building art dared to rear such structures, until the coming of steel-cage construction and the American skyscrapers

The ceremonial or hypostyle hall is the heart of the typical temple. Behind it is a sanctuary, and before it a public forecourt, and these too are enormous and lavishly decorated. Outside, an avenue of sphinxes formed an appropriate approach. The whole, at Luxor and at Karnak, was dedicated to the worship of Amon. The architects of the Middle and the New Kingdoms seem to have exhausted themselves in the achievement of this one type of building. Temples and tombs almost tell the whole story of permanent Egyptian architecture.

Sculpture under the Middle Kingdom flowered in some monuments not greatly inferior to the Old Kingdom standards. There are free-standing statues and reliefs that carry on enjoyably the traditions of Memphis and Sakkara. But the seeds of dilettantism have been sown, and that other degenerating influence, mass production, enters in, so that a disastrous academism and a monotony soon result.

There are numberless mediocre and lifeless sphinxes and neat imitations of the old king-figures, and repetitions of this and that god-fetish. But the inspiration has been dulled, the old magic synthesis of nature and sculptural form is lacking. The conventions that once could be varied into individually living images are rigidly stereotyped. The effects are repetitious and dull. The mountainous solidity is echoed, not creatively achieved.

There are exceptions, approaching the plastic and moving nobility of the seated *Kiafre* in diorite and the wooden *Village Magistrate*. But the best things of the period, as left to us, are detached heads. The probable explanation is that the conventions of body representation had crystallized, had become academic—the life is gone from the figure, of which the crouching skirt-enveloped priest or scribe is a common type—and all the artist's love and invention centre in the face. At any rate there are heads that rank high in combined sensitivity and massiveness, and there is no reason why we should not take our joy of these fragments, forgetting the rest.

Relief-sculpture of the Middle Kingdom is in a better way. It has a fresh note. The naive conventions found in the reliefs of the Sakkara tombs are less noticeable, and the fresh childhood vision has measurably passed. The artists know more, possibly feel less. But the reliefs of Queen Hatshepsut's temple are engaging and decorative. Colour counts for more, without the artist yet insisting upon this as painting rather than sculptural drawing. It

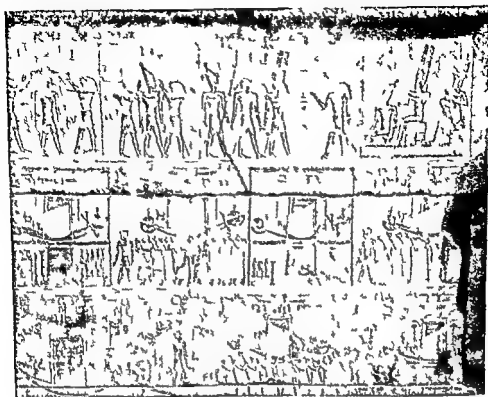


Head of statue of Thutmose III *Cairo Museum*  
[Photo, courtesy *Metropolitan Museum of Art*]

should be added that the mural art was extended to the inner and outer walls of stone sarcophagi, and to chair panels and other utilitarian surfaces.

The queen's temple walls tell long stories of the building and furnishing of the shrine, with excursions, like the one to Punt, in search of plants and precious woods, and there are gods, ceremonies, painted offerings, and innumerable souvenirs of the queen's life and reign. Hatshepsut was involved in intrigue and controversy, and made such bitter enemies that after her





Wall relief Temple of Amun Karnak  
 [Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

death every representation of herself on the walls was erased usually making way for the image of her successor

It might be claimed that Egyptian builders went to extremes in their devotion to relief decoration pictorial and inscriptive. The great temples yield up not only their flat walls but every inch of column surface and architrave and door jamb to the picture-artists. Structural members are over-ridden, joists obscured, and architecture is in general sacrificed for a relief-decorator's holiday. The result should be downright bad, destructive of building unity, unarchitectonic, cheapening. All the rules of structure are against the working over of the weight-carrying members. But perhaps it is all made up for in the richness of the coating. The audacious scale of the sculptural job fits in with the daring of the enormous temple piles. Probably these Egyptian temples never had the architectural purity of the Greek Doric temples or of



Whip handle in the form of a running horse, tinted ivory, 18th Dynasty  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

the pyramids, in any case. The fat columns—perhaps over-all tracery is right for them! And the reliefs yield so much enjoyment when studied separately that even an architectural purist would hesitate to condemn them.

There are equally engaging things in the jewellery, the pottery, and the minor crafts of the time. The bracelets, necklaces, and armlets are endlessly satisfying. They make one covetous, and uneasy about the obviously degraded standards of design of today, more than thirty centuries later. Colour is gorgeously used in vase and brooch. Human and animal forms are beautifully simplified and stylized in relief for jewel-box or comb. There is mastery of form and technique in a thousand miniature use-objects to be found in representative museum collections.

Between the Middle and the New Kingdoms there was a break in tradition. Egypt was under a foreign yoke. When the country had been freed and reintegrated, the arts again knew a renaissance. Sculpture above all found fresh nourishment. The kings who delivered the country and went on to imperial grandeur and renewed display were those of the Eighteenth Dynasty, established in 1580 B.C. The outstanding figure in this succession was Thutmose III, whose portrait statues sometimes re-create the dignity of the Old Kingdom sculpture. It is his exploits in extending the bounds of the Egyptian empire into Syria, the Aegean Isles, and Nubia that, mainly, supply the motives for the reliefs on the walls at Karnak. But it was four reigns later that the greater development, or revolution, in art occurred.



Portrait of Ikhnaton's daughter, sandstone, el-Amarna. *Egyptian Museum, Berlin*  
[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

Ikhnaton, known to the conservative archaeologists, and to the priests of his own time, as "the heretic king," but today widely lauded as an admirable rebel and prophet, introduced a new sort of portraiture. The traditional conventions are dropped, the artist is given full latitude in depicting and sharpening the peculiar characteristics of his sitter, and a psychologically interesting portrait results. The purely sculptural values are not lost, though there is less of the mountaneous repose and less of the powerful enclosed sculptural movement. In general, vitality gives way before vivacity, and solidity yields to natural appearance.

Portrait heads of Ikhnaton himself and of his queen, Nofretete, are among the most amazing and enjoyable things in the whole range of individual portraiture. The truth is more than surface realism. It is a revelation of inner



*Akhenaton Plaster, 18th Dynasty Egyptian Museum, Berlin*  
[Courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

character, and it gives away the man more certainly than the camera ever could. A whole school of twentieth-century modernism is anticipated in this New Kingdom achievement. The psychological sculpture of Epstein is no more penetrating, hardly more Freudian.

It is, however, just as well to be cautious in accepting the belief of realistic-minded archaeologists (supported by doctors) that the portraits with elongated heads are exact images of the royal family, far along in macrocephalous degeneration. We moderns have heard the distortions and malformations in El Greco paintings and in Cambodian sculpture explained by learned sci-

entists as naturalistic portrayals of abnormalities, only to find later a more satisfying artist's reason for them. There are too many elongated heads in the Egyptian reliefs of the time to permit the explanation on grounds other than that they are a convention with compositional purpose.

But the utter lifelikeness of facial aspect remains. There remains too the subtle psychic revelation, the report on the man's soul. The sculptor has gone deeper into the make-up of the sitter's personality than ever before. Perhaps earlier kings had forbidden the too personal probing, had wanted individual variant cloaked under a generalization of nobility and kingliness. There is no doubt that Ikhnaton in contrast asked that the soul be brought into the light, the inner man expressed with the outer, all bars let down. Even the queen is done without idealization, without enlargement or suppression. In the famous coloured limestone in Berlin, to be sure, she wears her jewelled collar and her high decorated hat. But the thin neck and angular jaw are not even glossed over. Perhaps the very thinness adds a spiritual impression. In any case here is the alert, eager inner being brought forth intimately to the observer. One should not miss the perfect lift of the head, the pose of all faculties in readiness, the vivacious repose.

Just what is the connexion between the æsthetic revolution in Ikhnaton's time and the religious overturn he accomplished? No one has been able to say. This king born Amenhotep IV, and brought up to worship the most exacting and powerful of competing gods, became the world's first outstanding monotheist. He turned from foreign conquests and elaborate political-ecclesiastic intrigue to attempt the reorganization of national life on a unified spiritual basis. Of course his empire went to pieces and ultimately the priests of the many traditional gods regained the ruling power, but only after he had officially banished all other deities in favour of Aton, the sun-god, god of light, and the one Truth. Amenhotep changed his own name to Ikhnaton—"the living spirit of Aton."

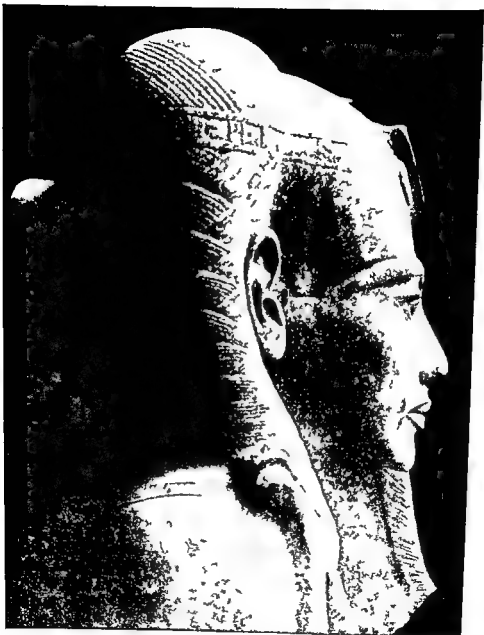
Besides being the first outstanding monotheist in history, Ikhnaton claims our attention as one of the rare rulers deeply actuated by the artistic spirit. To the fact that he encouraged his sculptors to cultivate absolute freedom of observation and portrayal there is to be added that he was a poet strangely suggesting the Hebrew psalmists and that he undertook building projects with a vision and a wholeness seldom paralleled in history. He planned no structures so grandiose as the temples at Luxor and Karnak. Indeed he pulled free of all those imposing and showy projects to which successive



*Queen Nefertiti Painted limestone 18th Dynasty*  
[Courtesy Egyptian Museum Berlin]

kings before him had been content to add their bits—trying to outshine in decorative augmentation and fulsome inscription all earlier kings

He entirely abandoned the Theban centre with its many gods and temples and built a new capital city at el Amarna farther down the Nile. In the ruins of his palace there were found the psychologic portrait heads which have so amazed and delighted modern eyes. In these ruins too were discovered the tablet letters the king's correspondence with colonial governors



Statue of a god Karnak detail granite 18th Dynasty  
[Photo courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

and tributary but restive rulers, which throw so clear a light on world affairs of the time pointing up the truth, incidentally, that a peace-loving, art-loving monarch, with revolutionary vision and spiritual insight, is no match for politicians and priests intent upon conserving or restoring the old order of privilege and prosperity

The wall-reliefs at el-Amarna, like the busts, are instinct with a new spirit. It brings in questionable as well as admirable freedoms. The rhythms are more melodious. But the figures often turn bulbous, and exaggerated, escaping from the flat-relief idiom, and the panels are overcrowded. Observation slips into caricature. But let us not make a mistake at their best these still are great examples of the low-relief art. Among the perhaps less successful large compositions are bits of relief that stand out in startling beauty. It was the fortune of archæologists recently to break into the studio of one of Ikhnaton's sculptors, and the models and trial pieces found there are extraordinarily engaging.

After the interlude of Ikhnaton Egypt returned post-haste to the old gods, to the old imperialism, and to the old arts. The only possible inference is that the priests, when they restored Amon and the animal cults and the old superstitions, took over control of the artists, and deliberately snuffed out the spirit of freedom that the heretic king had introduced. A little of the freshness of observation is carried on. But most of the celebrated art associated with the name of Ikhnaton's son-in-law, Tutenkhamon, is routine stuff, ostentatiously embellished, but by no means achieving a summit of Egyptian art. A recent historian, connecting the "Tutenkhamon treasure" with the idea of the restored wealth and luxuriousness of the Egyptian court at the time, unwittingly characterized this sort of art perfectly when he wrote "Fancy articles are known in richer abundance than at any other period." Most of the vaunted treasure shows the efforts to produce something "fancy." The evidence of sound craftsmanship is clear, but originality, virility, and simplicity have disappeared in the face of the demand for extravagant decoration and spectacular virtuosity.

There are to be revivals and renaissances of other sorts, but far from the spirit and form of Ikhnaton's artists. During the following dynasty, the Nineteenth there are splendours under Seti I and Ramses II. The latter, incidentally, added temporarily to his laurels by inscribing his name on any building or statue out of the past that appealed to his fancy, though he did



also restore half-ruined temples and build new ones, and kept schools—if not factories—of sculptors busy. In exceptional busts and sphinxes and colossi the old stone massiveness returns, the sculptural form asserts itself strongly and compellingly. One is reminded that, outside the sudden flame of the Aton revolution, art burned steadily, as a single Egyptian expression, from the thirty-fourth century B.C. to the thirteenth century of Ramses II, fully two thousand years of development and variation and persisting Egyptian character. Today the most superficial student of sculpture would name the diorite *Kiafre* and the quartzite *Ramses II* as unmistakably Egyptian works, as akin in spirit and intent and craftsmanship. Both bear the earmarks of great and essential sculpture, the latter less packed with power and movement and mountainous repose, no doubt, but with a sculptural language distinguished and of unmistakable magnitude.

Once more, even after the sensationalism and coarseness of the later things in the reign of Ramses II, there will be a brief revival of this monumental, essentially Egyptian art, under the Saite kings, whose line begins about 950 B.C., far down in Hebrew Biblical times, and continues through the period of Persian domination. The Saite monuments sometimes add an elegance, a smooth stylization unknown before, but the best pieces are marked by the old direct "thinking in stone," by the integrity of the block, the pristine sculptural honesty. In the finish there is more refinement. The hieratic control of subject matter is evidently relaxed, for there are fewer gods, sphinx-kings, and fetishes. The sweetness of nature's outlines and forms is oftener transferred into the statue. There are even female nudes, studied with evident relish and modelled with comparative fidelity to observation.

The reliefs remained to the end distinctive, characterful, and recognizably Egyptian. In Ikhnaton's time there had been a drift toward a rather flabby naturalism, not to mention an unpleasant caricaturist element, along with the better artists' capture of a new freedom. The later things—and there are critics who account the reliefs of the period of the Ramessid kings the supreme masterpieces of low-sculptural art—return to a stricter formalism and a more understanding regard for the crisp stone-cut line. There is a softer quality, a tenderer sensibility, but the conventions remain. From the unbelievably great number of relief-pictures extant, the modern can choose panels, friezes, and bits particularly of the later epochs, of the Saite kings and even from Greek-Ptolemaic times, that seduce the eye and engage the senses. The figures have a melodious fluency, garments cling to bodies caressingly



*Ramses II. Head of a quartzite statue, 19th Dynasty  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*



*Amenhotep III in His Chariot Relief on a stele Casro Museum*

(when there are garments), harmonious little waves flow into one another, the forms are rhythmic and lyric. It is, of course, now sculpture near a decline. For robust tastes it is already too smooth, suave, and evasive of the heavy mass and the hard-cut line. Beyond the outstanding ingratiating things there is a vast output slipping into decadence.

Painting as a separate art was by this time immemorially old. Twenty-five hundred years before it had notably separated itself from the bas-relief picturing. During the Old Kingdom it had touched heights of naturalistic, yet poster-like, depiction that thrilled all the discoverers and critics of our own nineteenth century. But the chief exhibit from those olden times, the famous frieze known as *The Geese of Medum*, is notable for its exactitude of rendering, along with a stencil-like sharpness, rather than for any deep plastic sensibility.

It is rather in the New Kingdom that painting takes its place beside, and independently of, sculptural relief. The wall-compositions seem stiffly conventional and attitudinized when compared with the "free" painting of Europe or the wash pictures of China and Japan. It is true certainly that the art in Egypt missed something of the development that might have been

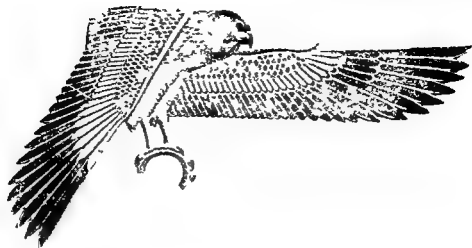


Relief: fragment of a sculptor's model, limestone, late period

[*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*]

expected from the very facility of the brush as contrasted with the sculptor's chisel. Traditional method and perhaps priestly control determined a rock-like conventionalism that persisted until Roman times.

Nevertheless, there are fine virtues, even stirring achievements, within the narrow limits allowed by custom. The tomb murals of the Theban area are particularly rich, sensitive, and vital. There are eye-filling fragments, and whole walls beautifully spaced and coloured.



*Eagle Faience ornament from a wooden box, about 400 B C*  
*[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

decoration. In another direction too it developed a distinctive and beautiful technique in the illustrated manuscripts known as Books of the Dead. These papyrus rolls were designed for tomb-burial with king or rich man, and served as guides for the deceased or his double on the devotional side of the after-life. They are books of the mysteries of the gods, and in general they seem to have commanded the talents of artists no less masterly than those who decorated the walls.

Seldom has a nation maintained its own methods and traditions of art over such extended periods. Only after thirty-five centuries of characteristic production, only after many generations of rule by foreign overlords, did the Egyptians set aside their own ways, and produce works obviously based upon alien principles. Shortly after the opening of the Christian era, painting in Egypt developed, under Greek influence, a special type of realistic portraiture, more lifelike and more pleasing than any surviving "independent" painting by the Greeks or the Romans. But this is, in the light of true Egyptian achievement, merely a postscript to the story. It is sculpture, the art of enduring stone, that expresses Egypt, that speaks, three thousand or five thousand years later, of a mastery of the stone never surpassed, equalled only, perhaps, in the sculpture of Central and Far Asia.

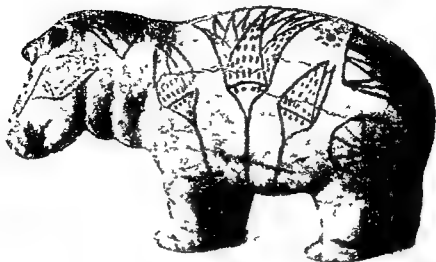
*Art in Pre-Homeric Europe*

AT VAPHIO, near Sparta, in the year 1889, Greek archæologists lifted the stone slabs covering an ancient warrior's grave. There was disclosed a cache of weapons, jewels, and vases, exactly as loving hands had placed them at head, foot, and either hand of the brave departed some thirty-five hundred years earlier. The treasure was particularly rich not only by reason of the number of golden vessels and gems included but also for the light it cast upon the nature of the pre-Homeric world. It afforded a sort of cross-section view of the decorative art of the early Aegean civilization.

The warrior's bronze sword and dagger, and his silver earpick, and the bronze sheath of his sceptre, lay beside the beads of his necklace and the engraved gems of his bracelets. But most notable, and indeed the high light among all the discovered relics of the heroic age, were two cups of gold, boldly wrought with realistic story-scenes: one depicting a hunting episode with trapped wild bulls fighting their captors, the other, bulls tamed and led to sacrifice.

These are the celebrated Vaphio Cups, familiar to every student of art from replicas in countless museums, and described as masterpieces in numberless essays and books. They are a symbol that popularly stands for the Aegean or pre-Greek civilization. They represent the extraordinary skill of Aegean craftsmen. They also reveal, let it be added, the questionable taste of those ancient peoples: their rather florid, full-blown luxuriousness and their love of realistic depiction. These drinking cups, indeed, afford a key to art as it was in the only civilized regions of Europe fifteen centuries before Christ, a millennium before the childhood of Greek culture.

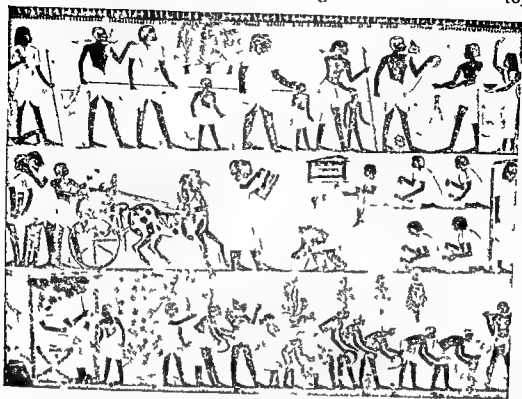
The uncovering of the Vaphio tomb formed a chapter in an archæological adventure of the nineteenth century, a serial exploration of forgotten lands



*Hippopotamus* Blue faience with lotus decorations, 12th Dynasty  
 [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

A word should be said perhaps about the mixing of lettering and picturing. The inevitable combination of illustration and inscription adds to the formalism and introduces a difficulty for the Western mind trained to take a picture alone, as expression in one sort of language, and not properly to be mixed with another. The Westerner's long acceptance of the selective photograph as the norm of pictorial art has something to do with this, perhaps too the fact that his own writing and lettering have long ago ceased to be pictorial or even richly decorative. In any case, the individual will do well, in approaching art in Egypt or Persia or the Far East, to cultivate a single eye for picture and incidental text. The mural here, like the later Persian "illuminated manuscript," is to be regarded as one plastic organization, as a single decorative composition. As such, New Kingdom wall-scenes are a never-ending pleasure.

The subjects are as widely varied as those of the sculptured reliefs, ranging from devotional exercises and funerary scenes to domestic and recreational episodes and the depiction of familiar flowers and trees and pets. There is extraordinary truth of observation, within the controlling convention. Birds



*Harvest Scenes Painted mural, from a tomb at Thebes, 15th century B.C.*  
[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

and animals are shown in exact characteristic outline, marking, and pose, men are fixed in the particular, revealing attitude of the moment. The whole is an almost encyclopædic treatise on men's occupations, customs, recreations, and tastes.

But there are, too, the grouping, the composition, the particular Egyptian stylization, to lift the achievement above the shallow attractiveness of routine documentation. The method is linear, with flat and rather monotonous colouring added, as might be expected when painting practically grew out of coloured relief-art. But the rhythms are decorative, and the whole effect vivacious and colourful.

Thus, although monumental sculpture remains the type art, the unsurpassed achievement of Egypt, contemporary painting has its claims to world attention and appreciation. Within rather tight conventions it grew and flowered and declined as engaging design-with-colour, as pleasing wall



which was in itself romantic, exciting, and almost incredible. A poor boy in Germany, one Heinrich Schliemann, had read the stirring Homeric poems, and he had dreamed of going to Greece and Troy to prove the existence of the described heroes and cities as actual, not mythical people and places. Schliemann in middle life, having lived his Alger-story, in which he made a fortune from international trade and mastered seven languages, betook himself to Greece in 1868. Defying all scholarly opinion, he dug for the remains of Homer's (and Helen's) Troy at Hissarlik on the coast of Asia Minor near the Dardanelles, and for the tombs of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra at Mycenæ in Argolis. He not only found the legendary city of the *Iliad*, and the graves, and belongings, of his heroes, or of other heroic-age personages very like them, but dug up fabulous treasures of gold and silver, including a queen's diadems and golden masks and pectorals, and handfuls of gems. At Troy and in the Mycenaean citadel and at Tiryns he uncovered the outlines of the life and the art of the peoples about whom Homer had written.

Out of Schliemann's work and books, and those of his follower Dörpfeld, and of Tsountas who found the Vaphio Cups, has been constructed the picture of a long forgotten pre-Greek culture, now known as Aegean, which takes its place as one of the major manifestations of human enterprise and advance. It is seen, too, as the first European crystallization of art-consciousness, the very cradle of Greek and Roman custom, thought, and craftsmanship.

In the end the uncovered Aegean civilization is found to embrace vastly more than the legendary Homeric people and events. Homer was a late and very sketchy historian, writing seven centuries after the most notable exploits of the Cretan sea-kings, and four centuries after the fall of Troy. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* formed a sort of cumulative catch-all of popular legend, theology, and remembered history. Through centuries the facts of the Trojan War and Odysseus's wanderings had mixed with myth and popular fiction. Nevertheless a comparison of descriptions in the two epics with lately discovered examples of Aegean art leaves no doubt that Homer—whether single or "collective" bard—fixed as accurately as a poet is supposed to the features of architecture and decoration and fine-wrought weapon.

The arrival of Odysseus at the palace of Alcinous—this would be about 1180 B. C.—is thus vividly described (in the translation by T. E. Shaw)

Odysseus stood there, not crossing its copper threshold. The brilliance within the high-ceiled rooms of noble Alcinous was like the sheen of sun or moon

for the inner walls were copper-plated in sections, from the entering-in to the furthest recesses of the house, and the cornice which ran around them was glazed in blue. Gates of gold closed the great house; the door posts which stood up from the brazen threshold were of silver, and silver, too, was the lintel overhead, while the handle of the door was gold. Each side the porch stood figures of dogs ingeniously contrived by Hephæstus the craftsman out of gold and silver, to be ageless, undying watchdogs for this house of great-hearted Alcinous. Here and there along the walls were thrones, spaced from the inmost part to the outer door. Light, well-woven draperies made by the women of the house were flung over these thrones. The feasters in the great hall after dark were lighted by the flaring torches which golden figures of youths, standing on well-made pedestals, held in their hands. Of the fifty women servants who maintain this house—some weave at the looms, while others sit carding wool upon distaffs which flutter like the leaves of a tall poplar: and so close is the texture of their linen that even fine oil will not pass through it. Athene gave them this genius to make beautiful things.

This praise of the palace of Alcinous seems fulsome in the reading today, and one cannot wonder that the Victorians and the Greeks alike put it down to fable. Nevertheless, the details have been verified again and again by Schliemann and his followers. The ruined palaces have been uncovered, and evidences found of the high-ceiled rooms, the metal adornments, the glazed friezes, the thrones, and the luxurious furnishings. And the craftsmanship might indeed be a gift of the gods, so accomplished were the workers in gold, bronze, clay, and precious stone.

A second detailed description, even more filled with wonder at a work of art, is found in that passage of the *Iliad* describing the shield of Achilles. Homer credits the design and making of it to the god-artificer Hephæstus, in a passage reading (in the Lang, Leaf, and Myers translation)

First fashioned he a shield great and strong, adorning it all over. There wrought he the earth, and the heavens, and the sea, and the unwearying sun, and the moon waxing to the full, and the signs every one wherewith the heavens are crowned, Pleiads and Hyads and Orion's might, and the Bear. Also he fashioned thereon two fair cities of mortal men. In the one were espousals and marriage feasts, and beneath the blaze of torches they were leading the brides from their chambers through the city. But around the other city were two armies in siege with glittering arms. Furthermore he set in the shield a soft fresh-ploughed field, rich tilth and wide, the third time ploughed, and many ploughers therein drove their yokes to and fro as they wheeled about. Boys gathering corn and bearing it in their arms gave it constantly to the binders, and among them the king in silence was standing at the swathe with his staff, rejoicing in his heart. And henchmen apart beneath an oak were making ready a feast, and preparing a great ox they

had sacrificed, while the women were strewing much white barley to be a supper for the hinds. Also he set therein a vineyard teeming plentifully with clusters, wrought fair in gold, black were the grapes, but the vines hung throughout on silver poles. Also he wrought therein a herd of kine with upright horns, and the kine were fashioned of gold and tin. Also did the glorious lame god devise a dancing-place. Also he set therein the great might of the River of Ocean around the uttermost rim of the cunningly-fashioned shield.

It is no longer possible to wave aside this seemingly impossible list of constellations, cities, feasts, battles, herds, dancing throngs, the earth itself, the ocean, as the product of poetic licence—or as impossible of representation in metal. For if one examines the picturing in the outstanding goldsmiths' and bronze-workers' art from Mycenaean or Minoan times, one finds that there are metal objects in every way as ambitious as this within their smaller compass. It is not impossible that some day a fortunate archaeologist will turn up with his spade Achilles' shield or its peer, and find the account accurate. Homer's description gives a perfect picture of Aegean art at its height: the amazing skill and the crowded content, the athletic vigour and the intricacy and the lifelikeness. That it is mediocre art, in all but the technical mastery and the realism, is not of great importance here.

What does signify is that out of the uncovered remains of the pre-Homeric world, there has been woven a stirring picture of a mighty civilization, a close-knit culture extending from Crete to Greece proper to Asia Minor, and to outposts in Sicily and Cyprus and Sardinia. This was a pre-Greek integration that held together for nearly two thousand years, a vigorous if scattered polity that dominated a great part of the territory first wrested by mankind from primal wilderness.

If the ruins of Troy and Cnossus and Tiryns, and the relics from Mycenae and Vaphio and Dendra, were of scattered "styles" and dissimilar types, there would be no historical warrant for setting up the Aegean civilization and its art beside the Babylonian and the Egyptian. But it is almost as distinctive as the one, and, to the Western world, more significant, more formative, than the other, if only in its heritage to the Greeks.

The whole cycle of Aegean artistic culture can be charted, as a thing separate from the parallel developments on the Nile and the Euphrates, can be traced from Neolithic crudity through rise, climax, and fall. It is no singly centred manifestation, it is rather the shifting, fluctuating activity of groups



*Horse and Rider. Archaic Greek statuette, terra cotta*  
[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

of like-living and intermingling communities within the bowl of the Aegean Sea. But its monuments and mementoes are stylistically, basically of a piece.

Without the art relics the archæologists would be unable to say that this was a unit, a cultural entity, from the evidence of racial origin or political organization. But through the rise, triumph, and fall of Cretan sea-kings, through a subsequent Mycenaean period, through a decadent era of dispersed peoples and foreign invasions, a single tide of art flows, recognizably.

Here are the weapons and the pots, the tombs and the palaces, the fine-wrought golden vessels, and the distinctively engraved gems to prove that the first civilized culture on European soil was not derived from the Orient or merely a mixture of crossing elements from Egypt, Babylonia, and Syria. We can visualize the admirals and mariners of the island kings pushing their vessels to the mouth of the Nile and to Asiatic shores, doubtless absorbing

much from their frequent and many-sided commercial contacts with older cultures. But this was nonetheless a creative national entity, itself shaping and feeding the fire that was to flame again in Athens, then in Rome, and so to light Europe in many ages after.

The period and the place of Aegean art have a storied air, a romantic aura. Homer and the Greek dramatists and poets so mingled myth with fact, so wove for us all a fabric wherein real kings and maids and heroes and shepherds walked with Olympian gods and field-deities and divinely favoured nymphs, that it is difficult to remember that the Aegeans were actual men and women, of common flesh and blood. Yet they must have had to make a living, to perform the daily round of work and play and devotion.

The localities from which the Aegean relics have come are blessed with names that themselves cast a golden haze over the subject. For the graven cups and inlaid swords and ivory statuettes are found in Troy and Argolis, in Samos and Rhodes, in Cnossus and Lesbos, among the Cyclades and in Arcady.

The Cretans seem to have been less serious about their gods than were the Egyptians, with whom they had occasional intercourse, sometimes commercial and political, sometimes piratical. They built no separate temples, they were content with shrines in palaces and perhaps in humbler dwellings, though religious symbols are frequent in their decorative art and small images of goddesses or priestesses are found. Nor was the divinity or priestly character of the king insisted upon. He cultivated no air of remoteness, did not isolate himself. Indeed, the caste system is here far less evident than elsewhere in the ancient world. Among the higher virtues was reckoned hospitality, as Homer so often testified.

That they were not predominantly a fighting people is argued by some extensive palaces without fortifications and by the comparative infrequency of the warrior figure in pictorial art—in striking contrast to the Babylonian. They were by all accounts commercial and seafaring pioneers and by that reason examples of their arts are occasionally found in tombs on the Nile, in Palestine, in Sicily, Italy, and Sardinia. Egypt in turn particularly influenced their craft techniques and their ideas of art.

Some historians, escaping the romantic view, have realistically called them the sea-pirates of Crete, and it is probable that the line between commerce and brigandage was not then nicely drawn. At home the daring and realism of the seafaring way of life were matched by a largeness and naturalism and

colour in decoration, dress, and sports. The Aegeans, the leaders at least, were markedly given to splendour in adornment and in pleasures. Racially, all authorities agree, the pre-Homeric peoples of Greece and the Aegean basin were not of the stock that later became, as invaders, the Greeks of classic history; but doubtless they mingled with those who are said to have "driven them out."

What is the spirit of this art that marks it off so decisively from Babylonian or Persian or Egyptian expression? Why is it said that here begins, not only geographically but æsthetically, the true art of Europe, the classic heritage, the Western manner?

Looking forward to mature Greek art—say of a thousand years after the fall of Cnossus—one may characterize it as having a believable reality, a sweet reasonableness, a logic of truth to nature, that is foreign to Oriental manifestations. It is the art of intellectually mature peoples. The mystic element, the naïve and the delicately sensuous, have gone out of it.

Aegean art early came to this logical clarity, this reasonable delineation of the world. Typically it is realistic rather than imaginative or formalistic. Its subject-matter is drawn from familiar life, from local events. The testimony of the eye is respected more than the urge to formal creation. It is thus more intimately human. It registers easily, taxes no one's imagination, pleases by reminders of known things. By the same token it is nearly always somewhat thin, obvious, intellectually engaging rather than æsthetically compelling. It reproduces the movement of outward life, speaks little of the stillness and the calm imagery of the inward spirit.

For a time, of course, it has its early strength, its naïve conventions, its direct leap to formal expressiveness. But sooner than elsewhere the primitive virtues give way before the sophisticated desire for realism and luxurious ornamentation. Perhaps ideas of foreign luxury-art are imported and misinterpreted. The Vaphio Cups, the golden jewellery, the painted vases, the Homeric descriptions, the women's costumes as depicted in the murals, all indicate an early transition into the naturalistic and the superficially decorative, even the capricious. From this phase art passed on to stylization, but of a sort neither deeply original nor plastically inventive. Here is a fashion of art rather than one of the world styles. And yet of its sort it is masterly and intriguing; and its artists were the forefathers of the Greeks, of the Romans, and of the intellectual West.

It was due to the accidents of time and exploration that what is today called Aegean art was first studied as Mycenaean, then as Cretan or Minoan. The unity of the whole has been discerned only after comparison of these two main manifestations, which had been uncovered in the wrong order, and the fitting in of evidence from literally hundreds of other centres.

The student does well to fix in mind the two main recognized divisions of Aegean art: the Minoan, so named for King Minos from whose palace at Cnossus in Crete the outstanding evidences have been recovered, and the Mycenaean, as exemplified in the palace and tombs and trinkets uncovered by Schliemann at Mycenæ in Argolis, on the Greek mainland. All other manifestations, whether Trojan, Cypriote, Cycladic, or whatever other local variation, can be related to these two.

Although Neolithic pottery exhibits differences as between the Peloponnese and Crete, it is supposed that in general the earliest art of the Aegean basin belonged to one racial and cultural growth. Certainly there was likeness through the opening Bronze Age, and there is ample evidence of intercommunication later over the great area from Thessaly to Crete, from Troy to Rhodes and even so far as Cyprus. The primitive pottery is interestingly decorative, the stone bowls are well formed, the first metal weapons are functionally pleasing, and the jewellery is fairly agreeable. There are, too, the usual crude terra-cotta figurines. But on the whole there is less than is usual of finely primitive expressiveness. Some of the polished stone bowls are exceptionally proportioned, with decorative exploitation of the natural striations, but this may indicate an early link with Egypt rather than native invention.

What needs to be detailed of the story, from the twilight of the Neolithic to the noon of the Bronze Age, is best told in terms of the findings at Cnossus and elsewhere in Crete. The kings of a few Cretan cities were, so far as now known, politically the protagonists of the entire Aegean drama to 1450 B.C., and the representative art history of the region may be said to begin with their emergence from the darkness of Neolithic tribal wanderings, at about 3000 B.C.

When Schliemann scratched over parts of Crete in search for Homeric relics he was less fortunate than at Troy and Mycenæ. It was Sir Arthur Evans instead who uncovered, about the year 1900, the ruins of the palace and city of Cnossus. This had been for considerable ages the very heart and centre of



*Mycenaean vase*

*[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

the Aegean world known to Homer as chief of the hundred Cretan cities In honour of King Minos Evans called the culture disclosed by his explorations the "Minoan, and he constructed an elaborate chronology by which all later archaeologists have classified their finds whether in Crete or Greece or the minor islands as Early, or Middle, or Later Minoan There was of course the usual scholarly controversy over the matter, it being contended for instance that the wrong king was being honoured, since Minos was at the end of the Cnossian dynasties and since he probably ruled at the time of the destruction of this culture rather than during its development and flowering This was the King Minos whose wife was fabled to have given birth to



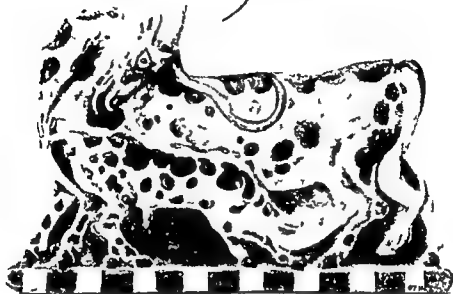
the Minotaur, the bull-headed human monster that fed, in the Labyrinth, on the maidens and youths periodically levied as tribute from Athens, till Theseus with the help of Minos's daughter Ariadne dispatched the monster

But Evans's terminology and chronology have proved so useful that all Aegean art down to the fall of Troy is likely to be identified by his categories. The terms First, Second, and Third Mycenaean Periods are useful for reference too, since Cretan and mainland art do not exactly correspond. Some historians still insist upon the wider designation Early, Middle, and Late Bronze-Age art.

By using scientific archaeological methods, measuring deposits from bed-rock to topmost ruins (generally the remains of several cities or palaces are superimposed on each site), and by ascertaining dates of isolated Egyptian relics found at Cnossus, and of Cretan objects found in Egyptian tombs, Evans constructed a standard table covering cultural and artistic development from the first emergence to the final destruction of Cnossus. Roughly his Early Minoan Period extended from 3000 B.C. to about 2100 B.C. The Middle Minoan Period extended to 1580 B.C. or thereabouts, and the Late Minoan, covering the outstanding architectural and mural works, from 1580 to about 1400 B.C., or, including the entire process of decadence, to 1100 B.C.

Pottery is the art in which the evidence of the growth of the culture is most complete, and the Aegean vases and bowls are doubly important historically because they were also to lead on to that vase-painting which is Greece's one greatest achievement in graphic art. In shape the pots and bowls and vases show the usual satisfying proportioning from a very early period, with incised ornamentation or elementary painting. It is rather in the variety of shapes, refinement of technique, and abundance of ornament that gradual advance is witnessed. Particularly in the Middle Minoan Period, rich polychrome designs appear, and the delicacy of the pieces is marked, the glazes taking on a porcelain-like subtlety. Toward the end, in the Late Period, there is the tendency toward stylization and geometrization which may be a link with the Greek development of a millennium later.

In general, however, the ornament on Cretan pottery may be said to run to a sort of florid naturalism. It is seldom sensitive and is frequently capricious. The design is almost invariably asymmetrical. The flower-sprays and animals and fish are often so directly copied from nature that it is less correct to speak of the 'motives' than of the depictions. Particularly common are the seaweeds, shells, octopuses, and fish of the surrounding seas, as befits the work



*Cow and Calf Faience relief Knossos Palace reproduction  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

of craftsmen in a maritime civilization. The human body is not an important element.

Perhaps the high mark of Aegean ceramic achievement was reached in the eggshell ware of the Middle Minoan Period, as seen especially in examples found in the Royal Pottery Stores of the palace at Knossos. The late so-called "palace style" vases are more elaborate and showy, but delicacy and ceramic propriety have been lost.

Sculpture is strangely enough a minor art in Crete. The comparatively small amount found is bound up with the potter's craft rather than with stone or metal working, though there are stone figures from the near-by islands. The outstanding pieces are faience, glazed clay, or mere terra-cotta. Among them are the so-called snake-goddesses, or priestesses of the snake cult. These partly undressed but otherwise elaborately costumed female figures, with snakes entwining upper body and arms or held at arm's length, are terra-cotta statuettes finished in coloured glaze. An example at the Boston Museum

is by exception ivory, with gold bands. It is perhaps more important artistically than those actually found in the Cnossus palace, from which it too may have come originally. In its present restored state it has sculptural unity to a degree apparently unusual at the time, as well as considerable character.

But the snake-goddess type and all known examples are really more of interest for what they tell of religious custom than for plastic values. As so often in Aegean work, the broader sculptural virtues and the sensitive rhythmic adjustments are commonly obscured by the artist's desire to dwell upon every detail of natural form and every bit of ornament on a ceremonial dress.

More satisfying for rhythmic linear grace and simplification of form—due in part perhaps to their fragmentary condition—are the two faience reliefs which were once parts of a series on the walls of a shrine in the Cnossian palace. The plaques, one showing a she-goat suckling a kid, with another kid closing the group, and the other a cow suckling her calf, have no doubt a religious significance. But what is exceptional is the compositional completeness of each piece. There is approach to the play of main mass and minor, and there are binding linear melodies. In subject-matter both reliefs are notably true to observed significant detail and natural movement.

Large sculpture is almost non-existent at the excavated sites of the Cretan and Mycenaean civilizations—the famous Lion Gate at Mycenae being a notable exception—and there is no trace of monumental metal statues like the golden youths with torches mentioned by Homer. Religion did not call for god images and conspicuous idols.

In stone the reliefs on steatite vessels alone are outstanding. The most interesting are three vases found not at Cnossus but at Hagia Triada on the lower coast of Crete. The workmanship is none too expert, but the action indicated in two of the works is vigorous and the forms are bold. Considered merely as illustrational art the compositions are spirited and arresting.

The so-called *Harvesters Vase* is extraordinarily alive with depicted movement, and explains its episode with graphic vitality and documentary accuracy. The crowd of merry-makers sweeps along in some sort of ceremonial procession all the way round the jug.<sup>1</sup> The singers, with wide-open mouths,

<sup>1</sup> Although restorations and replicas are in general excluded from among the illustrations appearing in this book, exceptions have been made here. The available photographs of original Aegean antiquities are so far inferior to those of reproductions that five of the latter are shown. These include the cow-and-calf plaque, the Boar Vase, the Vaphio Cups, the Mycenaean daggers, and a mural painting. All are from reproductions in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and the photographs are used by courtesy of the Extension Division of the Museum.



*Snake-Goddess Ivory and gold*  
[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

and the harvesters, with flails over their shoulders, are caught up in a lilting rhythmic movement. This is far too elaborate a scene for such a small bit of stonework. It cannot do other than breed confusion for the eye. But it is marvellously detailed and vivacious. Stone vases were probably painted or covered with gold leaf, thus—the purist notes—adding another factor disturbing to sculptural calm and stone-like simplicity.

The *Boyer Vase* suffers less from confusion of figures. But it is so long and slender, being in the form of a horn, that the relief figures, in four bands around the vessel, are only fragmentarily in sight from any one viewpoint. The modelling here is not far from masterly, at least in the matter of the bulls. But the whole is an extraordinary case of method mismatched to medium.

In metalwork, too, it is relief rather than free figure that is significant. Some bronze figurines and ceremonial axe-heads in bronze and gold, vigorous and broad, represent a craft that finds fuller expression in figured cups and jewellery. Supremacy in this art lies less in the Cretan cities than on the Mycenaean mainland, and descriptions are better left to a later section, not primarily Minoan.

Cretan life and Aegean ways of design are more justly illustrated in the mural paintings uncovered in the palace of Minos, though one must add the precautionary note that these have been restored, probably with too much enthusiasm and conjecture, by Sir Arthur Evans's staff. It needs to be said at once, too, that most of the so-called copies in the museums and in books are replicas of Victorian restorations, and that frequently only a slight fragment or two formed the basis of the composition.

But there is authentic evidence that the murals were bright in colour, highly stylized in manner, and generally florid in decorative accessory such as frieze or incidental pattern. The illustrational scenes indicate little of the Egyptian sense of well-spaced composition. They are unarchitectonic. But the figures lie flat in true mural conventionalization. As in so much of the Cretan pottery, the plant forms are overheavy and posteresque or bear emphasized naturalistic detail.

The subjects of Minoan mural paintings range from stylized animals, gardens, and plants to single ceremonial figures, bull fighting episodes and complex court scenes. The medium is lime-plaster fresco, and the colours are separately blocked on, usually without gradation or merging, over an out-



*The Boxer Vase* Steatite rhyton, Hagia Triada, reproduction  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

line drawing. A few simple bright colours suffice. The wall-paintings at Cnossus are all from the latest Minoan period, about 1500 B.C., though there have been found fragments of the mural art of the ruined palaces underneath the one of that date now partially restored. A few smaller paintings exist,

chiefly on the side of a sarcophagus recovered at Hagia Triada. These are in the flat mural technique and standard fresh colours. Occasionally fresco was superimposed on a mural design in slight relief.

Adding the evidence of the wall-paintings to that of the statuettes, one comes to a conclusion not without interest in relating this epoch to that of the later Greeks, who developed their sculpture, with its ideal of the perfect human physique, in the same region. The figures in the Aegean wall-paintings, as in the statuettes of the snake-goddess, are beautifully set up, straight, the men high-chested, the women with breasts full and firm. In the murals and in the minor sculpture and on seals there is a convention of the shoulders held back and the waist pinched in, heightening the impression. Goddess, bull-fighter, court lady, and field worker alike are distinguished by this idiom. All seem nobly strong, athletic, and poised. This perhaps signalized a native physique of slender, lithe strength that was a characteristic of the sea-kings' peoples. The pinched-waist convention is seen in certain figures in Egyptian tomb-murals, characterizing what are now supposed to be tribute-bearers from the Aegean cities. In any case, besides the general realism of pre-Homeric art, the glorification of the human physique might also indicate a direct line of descent from Aegean to Greek.

A second convention of Cretan painting is that the man's flesh is indicated by a dark tone, the woman's by a light tone. This is useful in identifying male and female toreadors in the bull-fighting or bull leaping scenes, for it seems that girls entered into the sport dressed as boys. Here perhaps, in the forced entry of slaves into the bull-ring, is the basis in fact for the legend that Athenian maidens and youths were fed to the bull-headed Minotaur.

The palace in which the murals at Cnossus exist might well be used to test the truth of Homer's architectural descriptions. There is a complex of courts, halls, and rooms magnificent in extent. Now that some of the decorations have been restored it is possible to visualize too the colour and luxurious splendour that once surrounded the sea-kings and their courtiers. There were neighbouring crowded towns of unpretentious houses, some of them two-storied. Evans estimates that Cnossus at the time of this restored palace, the last of several on the site, numbered a population of one hundred thousand. 'But only the art of the palaces and the nobles remains.

Conjectural restorations suggest what may have been the visual aspect of the exterior architecture, but the remaining foundations and fragments, the column bases, and the few depictions in murals offer little to the student's



*Leaping Bull Scene* Painted mural, Cnossus Palace Partly reconstructed,  
reproduction [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

æsthetic enjoyment. Aegean architecture is lost beyond recovery. Moreover, the great palaces were probably built a piece at a time, more to live in than to look at. They had good baths and drains and a wealth of interior furnishings, but they were not monumental or unified.

The palace at Cnossus is nonetheless interesting for its indications of a way of life generously sprinkled through with the arts. The throne-room is large and well paved and has at one end what seems to be a sumptuous bathing pool. The walls were gaily figured, and the high-backed throne is still in place, though its decorations have been shorn off.

Other features are the many storerooms, in some of which huge jars were found. The storage chambers are so numerous and so large that archæologists have inferred the existence of a great commercial trade in oils and metals and other precious commodities centred in the royal palace. Some day the world will know more about these matters, for written records exist in great number, though still undeciphered. When the key to Cretan writing has been found, the history and custom and art of the Aegean lands will be made incomparably less obscure. Meanwhile, J. L. Myres in *The Dawn of History* has ventured the opinion that the clay tablets found in the palace at Cnossus include "inventories of treasure and stores and receipts for chariots, armour, metal vessels, ingots of copper and smaller quantities of unworked gold by weight. Other tablets contain lists of persons, male and female, perhaps tribute paid in slaves, or in person, as in the Greek legend of the Minotaur."



That the Minotaur may well have been the legendary representation of a sacred bull actually kept in this Cnossian palace by King Minos seems doubly likely when the ground-plan of the edifice is studied. For here are parts that form a veritable maze or labyrinth, with long corridors, false entrances to lead one down blind halls, and rooms to be reached only after many tortuous turnings. Haphazard planning may explain part of it: there is no symmetry in Aegean architecture, no axial planning. Nevertheless, the Labyrinth of the legend is demonstrably there in Minos's palace, where also are frescoes of bull-leaping. Greek legend has it that the designer of the Labyrinth was the famous artificer Dædalus, first of mortals to invent a way of flying. Since the essential truth of so much similar lore has been confirmed, further discoveries may yet reveal the facts behind the triumph and tragedy of the Dædalus-Icarus legend.

The word "labyrinth" came into the Greek language and so down to us from this remembered feature of the Cnossian palace. The palace in turn got the name from a sacred emblem, the double-axe, which is found in decorations on its walls and represented in golden votive emblems found in the sanctuary. The building is sometimes called the "Palace of the Double Axe"—that is, of the *labrys*.

The ruins of other palaces unearthed in Cretan cities confirm the impression of Aegean architecture as massive, diffuse, and structurally simple, on an uncentred plan and disunified in effect. So far as can be judged, the actual architectural refinements were slight, the columns lacking elaborately shaped capitals and organic mouldings, but the applied surface ornament was colourful and sumptuous. The simplicity of Aegean building suggests that structurally it, rather than the systems of Egypt and the Near Eastern countries, was very likely the starting-point for the early Greeks.

Small engraved seals have been found at Cnossus that show more skill and taste than went into larger objects and monuments. And the craftsmanship in a game-board found in Minos's palace is amazingly clever in its inlays and decoration, in its use of precious metals, ivory, and enamel. But it is in that other part of the Aegean story, the Mycenaean, that the smaller crafts are illustrated at their best.

Of Cnossus it remains only to say that the imperialism of the Cretan kings ran the usual course. After a period of great prosperity and power—for the court class at least—the culture apparently collapsed and all but disappeared. Cnossus was finally burned, and no further palaces were built on the ruins.

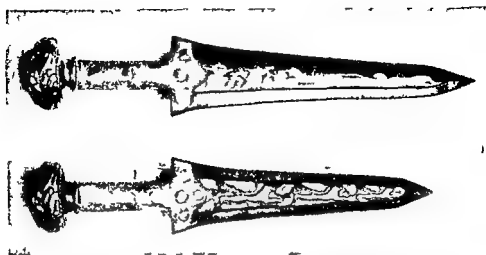
which had often been used as foundations after earlier catastrophes. Cretan art was not important after 1400 B.C. Thereafter it was the Mycenaeans who were leaders of the Aegean civilization—or perhaps chief among a circle of prosperous co-operating communities. The final snuffing out of Cnossus may not have occurred until 1100 B.C., but three centuries before, leadership had passed to the mainland cities.

The Greeks in their time knew of the ruins of Mycenae and Tiryns, and counted them as relics of a civilization of vague "original peoples" of Hellas, though ascribing some of their marvellous works to gods and god-men. The walls, made of huge blocks of stone, in particular seemed to be proof of a vanished race of supermen. The traveller Pausanias, writing in the second century A.D., noted that "there are visible remains of the walls and of the gate that has lions over it. These were erected, they say, by the Cyclopes."

The Lion Gate at Mycenae, famous then as now, is almost the sole surviving example of monumental Aegean sculpture, in or out of buildings. A triangular stone over a lintel is carved with two confronted lions flanking an engaged pillar, the whole forming a sort of heraldic shield celebrating the pillar-emblem (which had religious significance in Crete as well). It was the extraordinarily large blocks of stone around the lonely sculptural composition that gave rise to the legend of a Cyclopean origin. To modern archaeologists they signify rather that the people of Argolis, unlike the Cretans, felt the need to fortify heavily their palace-homes and their treasures.

In the "Grave Circle" at Mycenae there were discovered some commemorative stones carved in low relief which indicate, with the Lion Gate, that sculpture was more advanced here in the golden period than it had ever been at Cnossus. The figure compositions and the geometric patterning fill the panel-areas with a surer sense of plastic ordering, with greater satisfaction to the eye, than any of the stone fragments uncovered at Crete—though falling far short of Egyptian mastery. There is little of note in terra-cotta modelling, but two fragments of a box suggest that sculpture in wood may have been well advanced. There is, in metal sculpture, a large bull's head of silver with horns of sheet gold, the whole very naturalistically treated.

But it is where the arts of sculpture and jewel working meet that the Mycenaeans and their neighbours of the Peloponnesus were supreme. There are gold buckles and pins and dress accessories with geometric ornamentation either abstract or flower-derived, elaborately decorative crowns and diadems



Mycenaean inlaid daggers reproductions  
 [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

and necklaces gold and silver cups, sometimes patterned over, or with story scenes in relief. Even the vessels and utensils which elsewhere would be of pottery are here worked in sheet copper or bronze. Perhaps most beautiful, as a series, are the swords and daggers, bronze blades inlaid with more precious metals, in designs ranging from reticent abstract patterning to crowded pictorial schemes.

In these weapons there is touched a high mark of ancient craftsmanship. The method of inlay, later known as damascening, is not difficult. On the shaped blade and perhaps hilt, outlines of the design are scratched and the metal within the outlined figures removed to a slight depth, with space hollowed out under each edge—technically an 'undercut'. The gold and silver inlays are pressed in and hammered, and the whole is polished. The resulting contrasts in colour and texture heighten the interest of the linear and rhythmic design and lend it richness.

The art as the Aegeans practised it is seen in many variations, most often with gold and silver floriation or figure as inlay and incrustation, though there are also designs of simple direct engraving. Among the finest recovered examples are the blades with hunting scenes. The fitting of the elements of the design to the long narrow space shows a rare feeling for compositional order. There is here that which is so generally lacking in Aegean murals and stone

vases elaborate picturing without loss to functional integrity. The formal relationship of representation to available space and frame is duly observed.

The golden crowns and diadems tend to be florid and heavy-handed, and the masks in thin sheet gold—placed apparently over the faces of warriors at burial—are sculpturally unimportant. But many of the buckles, buttons, and minor dress ornaments have a delicacy within richness that puts to shame much of the jewellery of modern times. The engraved designs are geometrical—circles and spirals—and conventionalized flower and insect forms. One series of disks in almost uniform size, probably used as dress ornaments, runs to formalized butterflies, blossoms, and octopuses. Animals enter into the more freely designed individual buckles and pendants. They are sufficient to mark the Mycenaean craftsmen as master-sculptors in miniature.

The golden cups found at Mycenae are as a group extraordinarily beautiful in proportioning and in workmanship. If they have been overshadowed in popular and critical interest by the Vaphio Cups, which belong to the same mainland phase of Aegean art, it is because the latter are more excitingly figured, with elaborate story-scenes of bull-hunting and sacrifice. There is a superior quality of art in the simpler, reticently ornamented vessels, both those which are mug-shaped and flat-bottomed and the suavely curved pedestal forms. The rounding of some of the goblets with an indescribable delicacy of line, reminds one of a legend recounted by Greek writers, that Helen of Troy moulded golden cups to the form of her own breasts.

The Vaphio Cups, to be sure, represent better the spirit of Aegean art as a whole. They are luxuriously ornamental and there is a journalistic exactness in their pictured episodes. They might, in fact, stand for the art expression of periods over-intellectualized and decadent in taste. Products comparable in character, showing decoration pushed to extremes of profuseness and laboured to a minute natural exactitude, might be cited from the same period in Babylon, from the period of Greece's deterioration, or Rome's, or from the High Renaissance—to recall but a few parallels in history.

For all the lavish praise that has been heaped by savants and craftsmen on the Vaphio Cups, their virtues are in a perfect mechanical technique. That an artist should have shown so much on a small golden surface is marvellous, marvellous too the joining of outer figured shell and inner smooth vessel. But this is not organic art. The design protrudes. The bulging figures are inconsistent with the uses of the utensil. The whole is showy. It is only when they are accepted as specimens of illustration that one marvels over them,

noting with wonder the vigour and lifelikeness of bulls and men, and the sharp detail of ropes and foliage, and the whole air of swift observation and careless mastery. Here indeed, as some Victorian authority has remarked, is the work of a pre-Homeric Cellini. Here is exactly the sixteenth-century cleverness, realism, and extravagance, also the blunted sense of organic form.

The later Greeks, of course, were appreciative of this realism and marvellous craftsmanship. Hesiod, who like Homer wrote of the heroic age, summed up better than any subsequent writer the wonders of this early artisanship. In the *Theogony* (as translated by Elton) occur these lines in a passage describing a golden diadem devised by Hephæstus for Athena:

Full many works of curious craft, to sight  
Wondrous he grav'd thereon full many beasts  
Of earth and fishes of the rolling main  
Of these innumerable he there had wrought  
And elegance of art there shown profuse  
And admirable—e'en as though they moved  
In very life, and uttered animal sounds

It is illuminating that alike in Mycenaean times, in the era of the dawn of Greek literature and in the period of the Greek culmination, the lifelikeness of the object depicted was considered supremely important.

One other art, also miniature, flourished in Mycenæ and perhaps throughout the Aegean world. It is that of gem-engraving as exemplified particularly in seals. There are gold seal rings with picture designs and also unnumbered thousands of emblems cut on precious or semi-precious stones. A seal of this sort appears on the wrist of a cup-bearer as figured on a Cnossian mural, though the signet seems to have been oftener worn on a necklace. It may be inferred that every person of standing in Aegean society had his own device and the means for impressing it in clay.

The subjects are sometimes pictographic or hieroglyphic—in the still undeciphered Mycenaean-Cretan writing, partly syllabic partly ideographic—or heraldic, or freely pictorial. Animal motives are favourites, and there is often the muscular vigour and lively action already noted in the modelling on the Vaphio Cups, and here perfectly appropriate. Hunting scenes are common and the human figure is used both decoratively and for realistic purposes. There is indeed a wide variance of formalized and illustrational elements. Combats of warriors are not uncommon. At the other extreme are agricultural and nautical symbols and conventionalized natural forms. The



Figured gold cups, Vaphio, reproductions  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

craftsmanship and the sense of design are in general very high. Scores of examples are pleasing in composition, decoratively striking, and in a fitting crisp and bold style.

The story told in terms of Mycenæ and Cnossus might be recounted in part as pertaining to Tiryns or Dendra. The many centres were interdependent, their separate cultures overlapping, influencing one another, forming together the integral but varied civilization that is called Aegean. Sometimes one branch of art was more advanced at one city than in the others, but in general the arts as described are typical of the scattered communities, whether in Argolis and Laconia or the Cyclades or Crete. Only Troy on the distant Asian shore and Cyprus down in the Eastern Mediterranean demand separate notations—and Troy less for intrinsically valuable works than for the confirmation offered there of the outlines of a total Aegean development.

From about 3000 B.C., at the beginning of the Bronze Age, the history of the Troad has been traced by explorations on the site at Hissarlik and on the Trojan Plain. Because the settlement was strategically placed not only on the seaway from Aegean ports to the Black Sea but also in relation to a mainland route from Asia to Europe, it was affected by many cultural cross-currents. Its arts are therefore less purely Aegean than are the Cretan and Peloponnesian manifestations. Up to the time of the Mycenaean zenith, when Troy—at the time of the "Sixth City"—turned definitely Aegean, there is evidence of independent origin and development, and in some of the arts a strong influence from Cyprus and the Orient. The Trojans moreover were traders into Europe by way of the Danube Valley, and doubtless took as well as gave in that direction.

The early pottery was very little decorated, but some polished greenstone or jade axes are outstanding, and the goldsmith's art, especially as applied to articles of personal adornment, was advanced. After this independent, or Oriental phase of prosperity and importance lasting perhaps to 2000 B.C., the city seems to have lapsed into obscurity, the ruins of two flimsy villages now lying over the remains of more pretentious urban building.

But in the sixteenth century B.C. the Minoan-Mycenæan wave of cultural and political advancement spread thus far. The architecture then is on a par with the dressed stone palaces and houses of contemporary Crete and Mycenæ, and Mycenæan pottery exists beside an improved local sort. Troy then became the city and citadel known to Homer by song and legend. And the arts became interdependent with those of Mycenæ and Cnossus. Some historians believe that Troy, perhaps through Asiatic influence, had at this time temples—a distinguishing circumstance, since the other Aegean communities yield few traces of separate buildings commemorating the gods.

Shortly after the Trojan War came the further Dorian invasions which plunged the Aegean communities into their dark ages. There followed in Crete and Hellas and Troy alike the near-extinction of the arts.

The story of Cyprus is quite another matter. Independent at first, and of composite racial make-up later, the island peoples exhibit cultural lines crossing at many points with those of Babylonia, Syria, and Egypt, yet most entangled with the Aegean. The fact that the word 'copper' comes from 'Cyprus' indicates a special importance held by this metal-producing community along the highways of civilization in the Bronze Age.

From the evidence of the period from 3000 B.C. to about 1600 B.C. it is possible to infer an independent origin and growth for the island crafts. But the early pottery is not unusually fine, nor are the metal weapons and utensils, at first of copper, then of bronze. The true artistic advance came in a following period when Mycenæan influences—perhaps even in the form of an invasion—were dominant. There was then a vigorous push forward in the several arts, including pottery-design and metalsmithing.

It was then that Cyprus became a part of the extensive give-and-take of art manufacture and art trade in the Aegean basin. There are relics from a time before the Trojan War, but perhaps the main service of the Cyprian people was to carry on civilization after the decline of Western Aegean culture. The more favourably situated cities of Cyprus escaped the destructive



Cypriote sculptured head, terra cotta  
 [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

deluge of tribesmen from the north. It may well be that the islanders were the latest to continue the Minoan-Mycenæan impulse.

In any case there came in Cyprus, after the collapse of Aegean civilization and before classic Greece, a development of sculpture that is unique. It must have been Cypriote first, for neither Crete nor Mycenæ had comparable sculptured works, and the entry of Oriental influence and motives can be marked only *after* the submission of seven kings of the cities of Cyprus to Sargon of Assyria in 709 B.C. Moreover, there is not the wooden lifelessness of Assyrian sculpture. At another time it is Egypt that affords models and exercises sway over the island craftsmen and artists. They evidently were not above copying any popular article "for the trade"—but within a local freedom of interpretation. And for a time Cypriote sculpture in both stone and



clay was distinctive and important. It was more truly sculptural and individualized than any other development in the Aegean area before the Greek.

Most of the Cypriote statues had a votive purpose. They are found largely in sanctuaries. It seems that the citizens, wanting to pay due personal respect to their gods without neglect of more pressing affairs, developed a custom of supplying an effigy to do devotion at the shrine for them. It did not much matter whether the image was a likeness or not: a sensible god would know whose the impulse and the gift. Thus there grew up the convention of a few type figures, in standardized worshipful or respectful attitudes. A man or woman could buy one of these ready-mades, dedicate it once for all, and be quit of personal attendance. A rich man might go to the extent of commissioning an individual portrait. There are, too, images of the gods themselves, priests, and a specially common sort of attendant known as the Temple Boy.

As illustrated in recovered examples (the Metropolitan Museum in New York has hundreds) about ninety-nine per cent of them are as routine and mediocre as might be expected where such factory methods pertained. But there are many agreeably competent heads, and an occasional piece characterized by both human interest and sculptural beauty.

There are historians who refuse to recognize any strings of descent from the earlier Aegeans to the sculptors of Cyprus. They term these statues Græco-Phœnician, meaning that the archaic Greeks—who may be described as the conquered Aegeans now assimilated to the Dorian invaders forming the one race out of which classic Greece will presently rise—mixed with the Phœnicians to create a special island culture, not very different from that shaping slowly in Greece, yet not too different from marginal developments on the Asiatic mainland. The historian Carotti is even willing to merge Cypriote art with Phœnician, treating it wholly under a section entitled "The Phœnicians."

Phœnicia, the country that had taken over control of the Aegean and Mediterranean sea-routes after the decline of Mycenaean power, never matched its commercial supremacy with mastery in the fields of art. The Phœnicians are known to have been clever craftsmen and copyists, hardly more. They could take hints from Egypt, Assyria, or Cyprus itself, pound out an object somewhat like an imported original, and perhaps multiply a likely trade piece in a hundred copies. These went out in their ships along all the



Cyprote sculptured head terra cotta  
[*Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art*]

commercial routes to the westward and thus "Phoenician art" is encountered in many an Iron Age tomb thousands of miles from Tyre and Sidon. Carthage the colonial city founded by Tyrian traders on the North African coast opposite Sicily before 800 B.C. doubtless became a second centre for scattering this trade-art along with such leading commodities as copper and ivory and Negro slaves.

To the art student it is illuminating to see the Phoenician and Punic galleys thus carrying art-wares throughout the length of the known European and

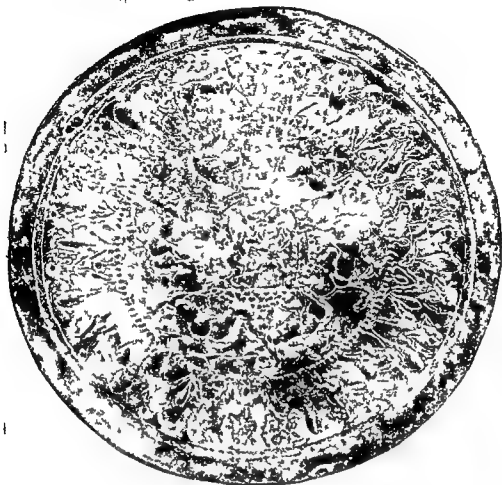
African worlds, even though the examples in general are mediocre copies or approximations of creative products. But it is hardly fair to tag Cypriote art as merely a phase of the unoriginal Phœnician contribution, considering the well-proved Mycænæan heritage, genetic and linguistic as well as artistic, and the existence of a body of Cypriote sculpture superior to anything Phœnician. The lines of nationality, of domination, of transmittance, become very confused here, for Cyprus becomes vassal in turn of Assyria, of Egypt, of Persia only to return to a later alliance with the newly amalgamated Greece, to which certain predomunantly Greek communities on the island had long been loyal.

If one turns to neighbouring Palestine, the influences are no less mixed. The Israelites seem not to have been born craftsmen, however great their literature. Biblical accounts are filled with references to artificers imported by the Israelites. When King Solomon bought from Hiram, King of Tyre, cedar and fir trees needed for the Temple at Jerusalem, and later sent an army of his own men to Lebanon to hew and haul timbers, the work was carried forward by "Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders." Later when Solomon planned his own palace, and one for Pharaoh's daughter whom he had taken to wife, he secured a craftsman from Phœnicia. "His father was a man of Tyre, a worker in brass, and he was filled with wisdom, and understanding, and cunning to work all works in brass. And he came to King Solomon, and wrought all his work."

This work turned out to be everything from colossal brass pillars with wonderful "chapiters" bearing pomegranates, and a molten sea (or sacrificial basin) on the backs of twelve oxen—"and the sea was set above upon them, and all their hunder parts were inward"—to highly intricate wheeled receptacles with sculptural adornments, and commoner shovels and "lavers." There are enumerated too the additional works that "Solomon made," the vessels and candlesticks and censers and altar, all of gold, to which he added in the Temple the historic treasures of David.

No less gorgeous were the wonders of Solomon's own palace, which so impressed the Queen of Sheba, so that no one can doubt that this Israelite capital, religious and royal, designed largely by Phœnicians, was one of the showiest architectural works of pre-Roman times. It was probably stylistically very mixed. The structural features were mostly out of Egypt. The cherubim abounding were from Assyria. But the rooms were finished in "sheets of gold."

The chroniclers go on to tell how "King Solomon loved many strange



Figured silver dish Phoenician  
[Courtesy Walters Art Gallery Baltimore]

women" and strayed away after their gods Ashtoreth (or Ishtar), and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And so the true Lord was angry with him, and it was not long before King Solomon's group of magnificent buildings was rent. The Babylonians were the immediate instruments of destruction. Later, when another temple had been built, and rebuilt, the Romans obliterated it. Worse, the Christians were to erect churches on the site, only to be followed by the Mohammedans, who have a mosque there to this day. Thus did a work of art celebrated in its era, perhaps the most pretentious and certainly the most overloaded up to that time, perish.

And students see in it now only an interesting example of the vicissitudes of art, and a strange example of the crossing of nationalistic or racial creative currents

The Aegean basin and the Eastern Mediterranean lands, indeed afford a prime illustration of the scientific truth that neither a "pure" culture nor a pure race exists. And yet the next development in this area will be so distinctive, so shaped by ways of doing and thinking new in man's cultural advance, that it will be a norm to which Europe will return at intervals through twenty-four centuries the Greek

## Greece and the Norm of Western Art

"IT WAS Greece," wrote Lechat, "that inaugurated art properly so-called universal art, not created for the eyes and intelligence of the Greeks alone Egypt had had Egyptian art With the art of Greece human art really begins "

Lechat took as text for his book *La Sculpture Grecque* a saying of Ingres, last of the Western masters to dedicate his life to the search for "Greek purity" "There was once on the earth a little corner of land where, under the most beautiful skies the arts and letters bathed nature in a second light, for all the earth's peoples and for all generations to come "

James Thomson put into words the sentimental longing that lay behind this common acceptance of the Greek as the beginning—and almost the end—of mature, civilized art He wrote

O antique fables! beautiful and bright  
And joyous with the joyous youth of yore,  
O antique fables! For a little light  
Of that which shineth in you evermore,  
To cleanse the dimness from our weary eyes

And indeed for nearly all of us there was a time in our most impressionable years when we were taught to accept "the Greek miracle" and "Athenian perfection" as ideas beyond challenge or comparison Classical education bathed Hellas and the Greek Isles in a golden haze We were expected to believe uncritically in the legend of a people gifted and inspired above all others We were accustomed and content to see the Parthenon, the *Venus of Milo*, and the figured vases with a glamorous light upon them as of an eminence unquestioned and unquestionable

In the larger view there is no question that the Greeks more than any others

shaped our Western cultural inheritance. European practice and ideals of art have been based on a study of their works. In the weaving of the design of European learning and grace and art, the Greek-Roman-Renaissance thread is predominant and determining. Shelley's exclamation still rings down the corridors of our universities, and our art schools: "We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their root in Greece."

The word "classic" means, by dictionary definition, "of the first class, of allowed excellence." Greek art has run off with the label "classic." It has been used, by common consent, to identify first of all the products of Hellas, from the fifth century on, and then the whole train of imitative and reflecting achievements. Roman, Renaissance, and, until recently, "modern" works of art in the logically clear Greek tradition. Greek classic art has been the norm for Europe and America.

In spite of growing and persistent challenges to the pre-eminence of Greek classicism, most observers, it is certain, do not so much doubt the superiority of the Greek heritage and achievement as gaze wistful and puzzled at a retreating but longed-for excellence. Modern psychology has made clear the reason for this indecision, which begins in a paradox: although we talk of ancient times and of ancient Greek art, it is we of today who are the real ancients of world history. Ours is the oldest (and at present, one ventures, the weariest) of civilizations. Greece was born and lived when the world was new and shining, when art was an adventure, and logical thinking and philosophy a youthful game played with exuberance and zest. Part of our attitude toward the Hellenes is and always will be that of an ancient toward his lost youth. Our sighing and our affection are for a time when life was uncomplicated, free, spontaneous, when art works were shaped in a certain clarity, with the sweet impress of a fresh joy in life and a pagan trustfulness. To whatever extent, in our latest maturity, we ancients may become disillusioned about the depth and formal intensity of Greek visual art, we cannot shake the fact of its clear morning-light appeal, its dawn-brightness.

There has been, nevertheless, in the three decades since the opening of the twentieth century, an ineluctable challenge to the classicists, and a turn, among foremost creative artists, directly away from Greek aims and ideals. Strange forces have been borne in from a rediscovered Orient, and out of the West's own new machine-conditioned way of life. The whole trend of thought and practice, at the moment, is away from the classic outlines and the classic spirit. It begins to come clear that what Europe accomplished in its imitation

of Greece, was not classic but neo-classic—or, to be more cruelly precise, *pseudo-classic*, and it is perhaps one of the marks of our maturity that the pendulum would seem to have begun its swing full-arc in the opposite direction

And yet, with all the reservations and rerankings and markings down accounted for, the Greek culture stands out as an almost unparalleled single national advance. After all it holds the essence of one of the two outstanding world ways of art. To get at the heart of its quality and its methods, more critically than did our fathers and our learned professors, while keeping our conviction of a distinctive and determining achievement, may serve to open our eyes wider to the excellences and variations in all world art.

Greek artists, free of the limitations imposed by priest or by king, shaped their ideas to a prevailing philosophy of rationalism and humanism. Their art is distinctively clear, intellectual, and true to the seen object. Mystery is abhorred, the meaning of nature overlooked, the divinity of the gods minimized. All interest centres in man, his doings, his pleasures, his feats, the idealization of his outward aspects. If he still has spiritual vision, if he experiences intimations of a life more profound than can be explained by reason alone, they are forgotten. For the first time in the history of art, the *thinking* man controls.

The key to the understanding of Greek civilization, as well as Greek art, is in this matter of a thinking approach. It is difficult for the man of today, to whom cultivation means primarily training of the intellect, to realize how unanalytically and childishly most peoples before the Greeks had accepted the world. Life then was commonly considered objectively, without questioning about causes, without the labour of "thinking things out." A few gods sufficed to account for the phenomenal world. A special caste of priests looked after the relationship of community and individual to the unknown. A wise man accepted, and believed what he was told. It is to the glory of the Greeks that for the first time a considerable body of men developed an intellectual curiosity, asked questions about causes, found it exciting to meet and discuss the nature of things, to conjecture about the objectives of life, and the methods of bettering human conditions.

That they perpetuated many illogical ideas and conditions out of earlier existence, that they fostered slavery and warlike pursuits, and evolved a materialistic philosophy, and thus went down to national ruin as had all



earlier cultures need not diminish admiration for that one advance. It was the first mass challenge to "blind" nature, and the first wide use of logical thought to solve human problems

Except for a very few leaders, men had been as children before. Now, on one side of human capabilities, they had grown up. The scientific spirit was born. Thought became a prime instrument of advance. Analysis preceded action. Anaxagoras said "All things were in chaos until Mind arose and made order."

The effect upon art was both releasing and confining. Intelligence was able to isolate beauty, to rationalize about its desirability, to encourage multiplication and production. But the intellect soon confined practice to aspects seen and copied, to emotions usual and rational, to the idealization of physical attributes. The clear, steady, light-of-day quality of Greek sculpture, and the logically arrived at refinements of Greek architecture, have much to tell us of one of humanity's epochal evolutionary moves forward. But of those enrichments of colour, pattern, and melodious rhythm in which the senses delight without asking why, there is no more than an occasional hint in the entire range of Greek production, from late archaic statue and vase to shallow Hellenistic counterfeit of nature. Of those overtones that arise from giving rein to the soul, leading the artist to depart from the normal seen aspect, the Greeks knew little. They capitalized the intelligence and philosophy of their age, but in doing so they lost sight entirely of what some primitive peoples had known, and what we today begin to accept, as a test of art's permanent worth: its content of a quality of truth from regions beyond and above rational analysis. Greek art is above all explainable, reasoned, sight bound.

Of the two ways then, in which the spectator's consciousness can be reached, by intelligence or by intuition, the Greek artist chose the former exclusively, and he carried intellectually studied art to its apogee. The Romans, following unimaginatively, were content to play at imitating the Greek achievement in its decline. The Renaissance scholars who picked up the classic impetus during a second historic release of the human mind into intellectual freedom, perpetuated both the rationalism and the confining thought bound approach.

The *Apollo Belvedere*, the *Hermes* of Praxiteles, and the *Venus of Milo*, three works worshipfully praised, may be taken as typical of the classical method and tradition. In them the idealized realism, the anthropocentrism, and the intellectualism are perfectly exemplified: man physically perfect presented as



*Praxiteles Hermes Marble Olympia Museum*  
[Photo courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

god, nature copied truthfully and prettily art transmitting a rational ideal, without sensuous enrichment or spiritual implication Today, to most eyes, they begin to look shallow, photographic, and obvious But we may believe that appreciation will shift back to earlier, stronger, less prettified works, rather than be diverted wholly from the Greek accomplishment These are,

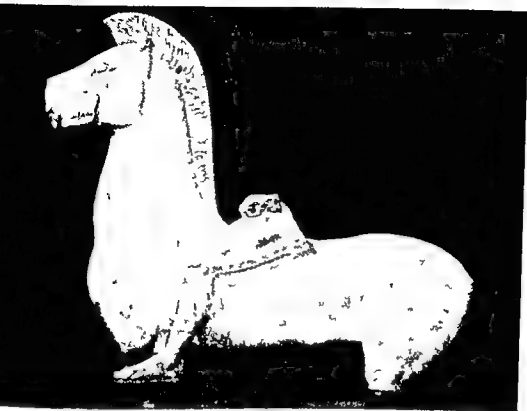
nevertheless, nearer the Greek type product, symbolizing as they do realism and humanism carried to their logical extreme of expression, with masterly intelligence and noble clarity

Ancient Greece was peculiarly one nation despite geographical conditions that broke the country into semi-independent city-states, and political custom that bred inter-city jealousies and frequent civil wars. The binding elements were a common, if loosely defined, religion, a common language and literature, and like ways of life strengthened by commercial intercourse. Even more striking in its human and æsthetic influence was the national interest in the Olympic games. To this festival held every fourth year travelled distinguished delegates, and especially the honoured athletes, from all the cities of the Greek mainland, from the Aegean Islands, and even from the distant colonies in Asia Minor, Sicily, and Italy.

From this unity arose in part the distinctive likeness that runs through the relics of Greek art. It is not only the subjects of graphic art that are endlessly repeated—first the chariot-racers, then the idealized athletic figure, the gods and goddesses (very human) and the exploits of half-divine heroes—Heracles, Achilles, and Odysseus, the sportive satyrs, the joyous nymphs, the centaurs and Amazons and Winged Victories, and later the *genre* bits. It is also a likeness of method, of approach, of a certain kind of grace, of sober but athletic thinking. It is as implicit in the sculptor's figures as in the finely proportioned, mathematically calculated temples and vases.

Even when there were "schools" and in spite of influences assimilated from Egypt and the East, there is the sense of oneness of a body of art with a single direction. It is not unified by priestly constraint as through most of the Egyptian development or by imperial direction as in Babylonia-Assyria, but no less is the mark of a caste upon it—of the free nobles who generally ruled the Greek city-states. It is a reflection of their tastes and beliefs. This element might well be termed "religious." The Hellenes lived in a time when religion was a part of the everyday social life. Acquiescence if not active devotional exercise was a foregone conclusion, a badge of citizenship. Spiritual awareness and mystic communion were not encouraged by the official Greek religion, which was matter-of-fact and human, at one with living. Art may in a sense be termed the visible face of this unity. Life, religion, and representation were harmonious parts of a reasonable and reasoned existence.

Art celebrated those qualities good in man—marked them out as pertaining



*Horse and Rider* Fragment of archaic Greek sculpture *Acropolis Museum*  
 [Photo, courtesy *Metropolitan Museum of Art*]

to godhead. The athlete was religious, the god was athletic. Both were intellectual. Here indeed, in life and in art, body and mind are one, and the spirit, so far as understood, completes the harmony. Thus the unity, the distinctive likeness almost throughout the story of Greek art. It is an expression of man, of his way of living, of the faith he held. It is communal art to the extent that it was not overbalanced by priests or kings. It is, finally, the first fixation of a typical Western standard of living and of art, as against the Eastern, and so it is immensely important to Europe.

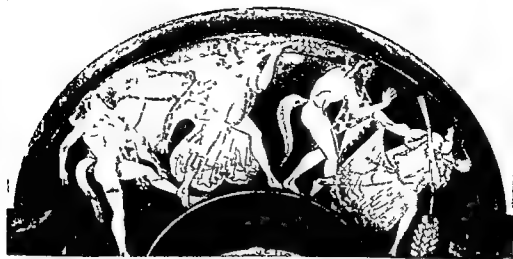
The Dorians who pressed down in successive waves out of the north about eleven centuries before Christ, to conquer earlier inhabitants of Hellas and the Cycladic Isles and Troy, were not, according to tradition, "artistic." They were known to later historians as barbarians who destroyed the Aegean

culture of Mycenæ and Tiryns and Dendra, just as similar tribes, probably closely related to them, had overwhelmed Cnossus. There was a long period of darkness between the time of the great invasions from the north and the beginnings of Greek art proper. These dark ages of Hellas may be indicated roughly as extending from the eleventh to the seventh century B.C.

The fire kindled by the Cretans and the Mycenæans was probably never wholly extinguished. The savage Dorian invaders smothered a civilization, lived without its radiance, but doubtless kept alive some sparks of it, found the warmth good, and gradually relighted the flame. What happened in the four centuries of near-darkness is largely matter for conjecture. Certainly ships were still sailing the Aegean and the Mediterranean. Phœnicia then took over mastery of the sea-routes, but there were doubtless trading vessels of many other seafaring peoples, including the Dorian-Aegeans, on the Mediterranean waters. The arts of Mesopotamia, of Egypt, and of Cyprus (itself half-Greek) must have filtered in. But the twin root of Greek art, along with the Dorian, is supposed to be Ionic.

The Ionians were a people of Western Asia Minor and certain of the Aegean Islands who developed their own culture earlier than did any of the other communities that were to merge in the Greek civilization. Tradition has it that Ionia was settled about the time of the Dorian invasion of the Peloponnesus, and it may have been the fleeing bands of Mycenæans who crossed the sea to form a new settlement, or it may have been Dorians and the fleeing ones mixed. The long cessation here as in Greece proper would seem to argue Dorian preponderance. In any case there was independent growth when once the cultural advance began. And indeed, because Ionia was on the Asiatic side of the Aegean Sea, such influences as came from outside were less from the old homeland than from Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, and Egypt. Ionian architecture may be marked as Eastern in feeling, the volute capital having prototypes in both Persia and Egypt, and Ionian sculpture is Egyptian-simple rather than of the naturalistic Mycenæan stamp. Early Greek art, then, may be considered to be the resultant of many racial influences. But it is notable that the central fact of Minoan and Mycenæan graphic art, its realism, is soon to be firmly re-established, despite invasion, interruption, and confusing cross-current.

The life and spirit of the Greeks, their abundant mythology and varied activities, their institutions and pleasures and beliefs, are measurably pub-



Vase-painting, red-figured, 5th century B.C.

[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

lished forth in one only of the visual arts. Not sculpture, heralded often as the typical, the supreme Hellenic achievement, but vase-painting gives us the Greeks as they were, affording illustration of the fullness of their interests, the occasional exuberance of their emotion, their worship of heroes rather than gods, their drinking and racing and love-making and industries.

In this painted pottery as in dramatic poetry there is the combination of nobility and intimate expression. Greek architecture in its survivals is characterized by a constraint, an intellectualism, that faintly chills, that is a little less than humanly warm. Greek sculpture early descends to a meagre naturalism. In the picturing on vases there remains the one rich record of faith and happening, of elevated thought and the lower passions, of custom and episode. Here is marked, too, the highest point touched by the Greek formal sensibility in visual art. The vase proportions are as exquisitely calculated as the Parthenon and the Temple of the Wingless Victory. On the early vessels there is a decorative stylization more appealing than anything else in the entire range of relics left by the Hellenes. The vases constitute at once their heraldry, their book of devotions, their decorative exercises, their testament, and their comic supplement. As illustration this is endlessly engaging, even exciting, as design it is satisfying, eye-filling, exquisite.

At first the objective pageant is less of the Greeks, of their ways, their

loves, their immediate personal living, than of their legendary heroes and inherited minor gods. The pictured exploits are those of Homeric and Olympian demi-gods and half-mythological kings and warriors. The obscenities are those of satyrs and maenads, not of real men and women. Occasionally, particularly as archaisms pass, as formalism weakens in the face of increasing realism, the intimate occasion and the familiar scene are recorded. There are bits from the athletic games, or a funeral, two comic actors, or women in the shower-bath. But more usually there are goddesses and heroes, the satyrs pursuing reluctant (or willing) maenads, the legends of the Trojan War, the Argonauts, and the Amazons, or rushing chariots, combats with mythological monsters, and Olympian romances.

Reserved and remote from personal emotional documentation as it thus is at most points, illustrating life according to a literary-allegorical convention, with men's feelings shown only through legendary anecdote and heroic analogy, the vase-record is still a revealing indication of Greek character. It fixes graphically the heroes and the great affairs recorded by Homer, Æschylus, and Sophocles, but it equally parallels the coarseness and humour of Aristophanes.

It is partly the existence of the occasional exuberance and the "unclassic" joyousness that has at times served to obscure the richness of the pottery paintings as art achievement. The authorities often relegated the finest vases to locked cupboard or top shelf. But there are many other reasons why scholar, critic, and student have overlooked or discounted so rich a store of formal art. The intellectuals are properly heirs to the Greeks, and the intellectuals found a pleasure in measuring mathematically the outlines and proportions of a vase—discovering relationships which they explained by mechanical formulas—while overlooking the gorgeous decorative quality and the illuminating human documentation of the picture thereon. The vase-shapes were symmetrical, "pure," chartable, and were therefore praised, dryly but extensively. The paintings or drawings, on the other hand, were formalized and stylized, and in that they were unlike the realistic Greek statues. There was that moral consideration, too, that they escaped from orthodox subject-matter into pastures questionable and even lewd.

The vases were discovered in large numbers, moreover, only in the nineteenth century, and the pundits of art were then concerned with the grand, the remote, and the monumental. The serious visual arts, the "fine" arts, were architecture, sculpture, and painting in the large. Greek pottery was

classed as an industrial product and so "necessarily among the lower forms of art," as one authority puts it. It is only as men return to enjoying and judging the quality of the thing itself, not in relation to size, that the living values emerge and establish themselves. Only within the present decade has it been respectable to enjoy vase-paintings for what they are as formalized art.

The earlier critic took it for granted that the end and aim of the vase-decorator was accurate delineation of the human figure. Because in the archaic period full-front eyes appeared on profile faces, and the figures were rigid or even distorted, the critics and archaeologists described the vase-artists of the ages before Pericles as groping and crude. Today it is recognized that correctness of surface drawing is something less than central in decorative art. The highly conventionalized figures are seen as extraordinarily right in their decorative place.

Technically, as decorative pottery, the Greek vases are inferior. Considered as an exercise in a mode of design, as clay vessels shaped, finished, ornamented, to afford a single formal appeal, a sensuous impression, they are less notable than the Persian or the Chinese or the Spanish. Except for examples from the very early periods they exhibit little unity of design, scant co-ordination of physical form and pictorial or ornamental embellishment. Their peculiar virtues lie in qualities that must in a sense be detached by the eye from the not too congruous whole.

But in two directions the achievement is so exceptional, so beautiful, that one finds it worth while to override the common rule that the detail cannot fairly be taken without relation to the whole, that only an excellence within a unity can be taken as valid. One of the supreme achievements is in the architecture of the vase. The other is in the decorative picture taken as such, at first as highly stylized, semi-pictorial space-composition, later as spirited and eye-filling illustration.

The enjoyment of the shapes of the amphoras and cups and pitchers is a pleasure allowed by classicists and dissenters alike. The drinking cups are obviously made shallower, wider, and suavely curved for eye-appeal. The storage-jars are built up strongly, architecturally, for noble solidity, in reposeful proportion. Even the squat little cosmetic jugs have their purity of outline, their exquisite adjustment of profile and mass.

There is a specialized literature on the subject of Greek proportioning of forms. The specialist finds it very exciting that the Parthenon and unnum-



able vases conform to storable geometrical rules of space division. And for the casual appreciator too it is worth noting that the testimony of the eye, which detects a certain logic of structure, a purity of expression, in the amphora or the crater, is confirmed by actual measurement. The width is likely to bear a certain relationship to the height, in one of the simpler ratios (as determined not arithmetically but in terms of areas), and this relationship is repeated in the minor relationships of parts. The formulas for proportioning have been worked out diagrammatically, most notably by Jay Hambidge in his theory of "dynamic symmetry," and by less known investigators of "the golden mean" and "the divine proportion."

That the Greek vases, as measured in outstandingly beautiful examples, can thus be diagrammed geometrically may well be considered significant. Certainly they appeal as extraordinarily "right," with a sweetly exquisite harmony of parts, and it may increase the enjoyment to know that a secret mathematical rhythm lies behind the effect. They are thus brought into line, too, with the hidden principles that distinguish the proportioning of the Pyramids, certain Greek temples, and the surface composition of Giorgione and Poussin. But it may be true that the mechanical explanation of the visual rightness is the reason for the very strict and narrow limitation of the Greek potters to a few stereotyped varieties of vase. The specifications are mathematical and intellectual. The potter both gains by his knowledge and lets it bind him.

In any case there is seldom a more delicate pleasure to the eye than in the run of cylices, or shallow drinking cups, in a representative collection. The purposeful attenuation of the lines, the fragile silhouette, the structural grace—these leap straight to our trained understanding. The cylix is an example of intellectually controlled art at its best.

To that other resource of sensuous delight—colour, the Greeks seem to have been near-blind. Their pottery as a whole is agreeable enough in what colouring there is—almost exclusively the shades of clay-red and black. But the potters show no interest in carrying the art beyond these crudely elementary colour limits. The Egyptians, the Persians, and the Far Eastern peoples show incomparably more invention, more taste, even the American Indians and the Mayans were the superiors of the Greeks.

But in turning to the pictorial designs—as drawing (or painting) fitted to pottery surface, one finds the Greeks again masters. Particularly in the period known as Archaic, the drawing is appropriately formalized, the black ele-



Cylix, black-figured, 6th century B C

[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

ments are patterned on in a perfect adjustment of light-dark, and the pictures are frieze-like rather than independently illustrative. Pictorial scheme accentuates structure.

The earliest Greek vessels are of a sort that might well argue a fairly direct, if sometimes tenuous, line of descent from the ancient Aegean pottery. As the new Greek nation—of, say, the eighth or early seventh century B C—represented an amalgamation of several long separated groups, originally of like stocks but variously acted upon, so one may visualize many influences other than those of ancient Hellas and Crete flowing in to affect the emerging art-consciousness of native craftsmen. The first marked “style,” that known to the scholars as “geometric,” is near enough to the late Minoan or Mycenaean to suggest blood-relationship. There was then a convention of banding, and other abstract formalizations led some distance from the typical Aegean naturalism. In the Greek geometric period the whole vessel might be traced over with a series of friezes—bands of circles, zigzags, continuous frets, meanders, etc. The whole was, in late examples, varied with zones in which bird or animal figures, heraldically simple, were repeated as decorative items. Then gradually the geometric elements became less important, men’s figures were added to those of animals, and the potters were on the way to the more typical Greek picture-vase.



Slightly decorated vase of the "geometric" period  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

The geometric-style vessels, despite colourlessness and a rather elementary command of ornament, have a pleasing unity that is to be lost later, and this period and the one immediately following—commonly called the "Orientalized"—afford the richest pleasure to be found in Greek pottery considered as pure ceramic expression, without regard to pictorial interest. The structural unity of vase or bowl is accentuated by the mathematical ordering of ornament. Function and decoration add up to one impression. And the patterning as such is rich, expert, vital.

The geometric pottery is most amply represented in the "Dipylon" ware, so called from the name of the Athenian cemetery where many examples were found, though some authorities count this a separate, late, or transitional variety, belonging down toward 700 B.C., rather than up toward the beginnings in the Heroic Age. The mere enjoyer of these things is here in the midst of archaeological controversies, and the choosing of objects for aesthetic pleasure often runs counter to the judgment of the vase experts as to what is important. One writer, J. C. Stobart, expounds in *The Glory That Was Greece*

a theory about the geometric vases which is suggestive if at points contrary to the later drift of opinion. Disliking the geometrically ornamented vessels, finding the conventionally diagrammed figures careless and clumsy and even repulsive, and the whole style "ugly," he ventures the thought that all the arts except music had lapsed under the Dorian invaders. Only the women had kept up their own craft, weaving and embroidering. So when the potter's art felt a breath of renewal, it was an alien influence that brought in ornamentation, from textile art and from the Oriental enrichment thereon. "The potter is a wretched, despised slave, probably of the old race. He has lost all his manhood and most of his taste, he gets no encouragement to make his cheap pots beautiful, and he has no models for design except the patterns of tapestry or metalwork."

This may be true enough as history, only, moderns find the geometric style enjoyable and mature. The traceries, doubtless drawn to some extent from patterned cloths, are not unfitted to the clay-worker's process. If Stobart finds the Dipylon style doing violence to all the canons of good taste, all the Greek canons, and he states as much, it is perhaps because he is excessively enamoured of *late* Greek work, which does indeed negate all the borrowed Eastern feeling for sensuous form and elaborated ornamentation. And Stobart slurs over and terms "un Greek" that next development, in which Hellenic potters made their nearest approach to Oriental mastery.

Even before the geometric style went out, this other Orientalized strain had come in. The ships plying the Aegean had borne into Greece many sorts of influence. The local potters must have encountered both those gorgeous fabrics prized in Persia, Babylonia, and Syria, and actual imported vases with the rich Eastern decorative fullness. There are "motives" too that can be traced only to Asiatic metal-chasing. In any case Greek artisans now began to produce elaborate jars and pitchers less intricately mechanical, profusely strewn, rather, with stylized animals, with rosettes and palmettos stopping up the spaces between.

Most significant is the Corinthian pottery of the mainland, and with it the Rhodian ware—explainable in its alien beauty because Rhodes is an island over against Asia Minor. These two varieties mark the one Greek approach to a complete ceramic style, fully developed on all sides, not only in the shaping and architecture and in the imposing drawing. There is in them a sensuous unity, and a carpet-like all-over ornamentalism that will not be seen again in Europe until the Moors create the Hispano-Moresque pottery.

During the seventh and sixth centuries the fullness gave way to those virtues of "purity" and restraint which are considered more typically Hellenic. Some experiments in colour left little permanent trace the black figure on red ground became standard. The shapes were improved, became graceful and stereotyped. Athens took over leadership in manufacture and export, though the Corinthian artists continued active, and Chalcis was notable among many smaller centres of production.

Vase-making at this time may be thought of as not so much an isolated studio activity as an organized industry, carried on under pressure of competition for both domestic and foreign markets, in a wide variety of wares ranging from kitchen-plain to fancy. The volume of vessels, painted and unpainted, must have been enormous, for they were used not only for every purpose for which people today manufacture their like—as kitchenware, useful china, ornamental bowls, and vases—but also in place of our glassware and metal containers. Huge storage-jars, common dishes, and tiny receptacles for precious ointments were all in the range of glazed or unglazed pottery, and there were special "lines" such as funeral offerings, appropriately decorated, and elaborate prize-vases to be given (full of olive oil) to winners at the Panathenaic games.

Not fewer than fifty thousand decorated vases of Greek and derivative manufacture are in museums and private collections today. Although the practice of signing vases as maker or decorator, lasted through only a comparatively brief period, nearly a hundred artists are known by name. Schools of painters flourished known by the name of the celebrated leader-master. In some families the craft was hereditary.

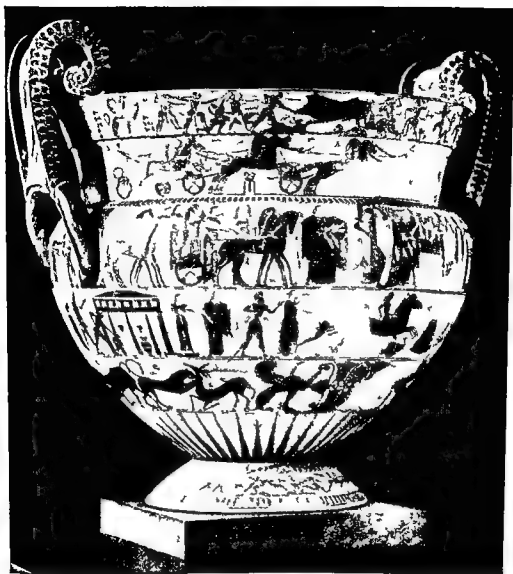
It is in the early and middle sixth century that the golden age of Greek pottery should be placed—and not in the fifth as the archaeologists have it in most of the books. The picturing had not then forsaken its purpose of decorating appropriately the surface of a globular vessel. Encircling bands still confirm the roundness, the centre of gravity of the figures is nicely related to the architecture of the vase. And particularly the drawing is still crisply decorative, light-handed, beautifully unreal. Later the pictorialists will eliminate the geometric framework, will be interested only in the surfaces large enough for a complete illustration, will even, at times, mark off two large picture-areas or panels and paint over the entire remaining parts with black. And of course they will progressively be obsessed with the



Execias *Dionysus Sailing the Sea* Painting in a cylix *Alte Pinakothek, Munich*  
 [Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

*naturalness* of the pictures—spurning the fine formalization of the sixth-century masters

Execias was an outstanding draughtsman, with an extraordinary gift for filling space decoratively by means of a few almost fragile pictorial elements. His design of Dionysus in a boat with grapevine and dolphins has been, with good reason, as widely published as any ancient composition. It is notable how the forms of dolphins, leaves, and grape-bunches are transformed into effective decorative items without unreasonable distortion of natural char-



Clitias *The François Vase*

[Photo courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

as being of two main sorts—designs in black-figure and designs in red-figure. Until near the end of the sixth century all pottery was in the simple technique common from primitive times: a natural red-clay ground with picture and ornament standing out in black silhouette or black line, or other dark varnish. Just before the year 500 B.C. a reversal of this order took place.

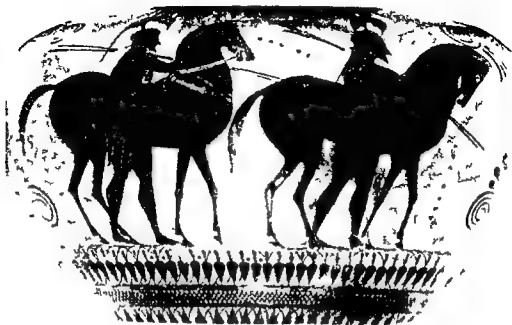
As before, the draughtsman outlined his intended figures on the red ground, it may be with some incising instrument or with brush. But then he painted in black not the figures themselves but the ground *around* the figures: thenceforward people and objects stood out in red against black, and history speaks of the red-figured vases. In some periods white and purple were sparingly added, but the main classification holds good.

The technical revolution by which the colour scheme was reversed was evidently fought over in the profession. But the proponents of the new style soon drove the opposition into line. Black-figured ware practically disappeared. With it went some of the virtues of Greek decorative drawing at its best. The vases were now showier, with their larger expanses of black lustre. There also was opportunity to do more documentary drawing on the red figures than had been possible on the black. Details within a figure in dark tone against light can be drawn only with a point. The black can be enriched only with a few simple lines to indicate drop of garment, or meeting of two forms or materials, or be brightened with patches of all-over pattern. The method invites the sharp incised line and creates a flat two-dimensional effect. But a figure in lighter colour against dark offers opportunity for multiplication of detail and a generally looser technique, with the brush as instrument. Immediately the art begins on its path toward accurate delineation and elaboration and toward a casual sketchiness. In the end vase forms and picturing both degenerate. The shapes become heavy, the designs florid.

Even before the red-figured ware came in, there was a marked tendency toward elaboration of the picture as such. Story-telling became more important, or perhaps merely more figures were crowded in. Indeed the archaic virtue of imaginative stylization gives way but slowly. Between the time of the geometrized men and horses on the eighth-century vases and the late sixth-century black-figure scenes, there is every shade of conventionalization. Some of the transitional artists revert to archaisms. Others like the sculptors of the time, are learning more about anatomy, and weakening their decorative mastery in a display of scientific knowledge. There are even faint essays toward the perspective scene. Pliny recorded wonderingly of Cimon of Cleonæ that "he introduced oblique images, and represented the features as seen from varied angles, from behind, above, or below. He marked the limb joints, showed the veins, and reproduced the folds in drapery."

The great period of red-figured vases is just before and during the Periclean age. The painter most praised is Euphronius, who continues to a degree the





*Horses and Warriors* Black figured drawing on amphora State Museum Berlin  
[Gottfried von Lucken *Greek Vase Paintings*]

formalism of Exekias, but in compositions fuller-blown and more heavily weighted. There is still a fine elegance in the drawing—one can imagine Flaxman tracing over the outlines with relish—and a hint of a return toward Oriental richness of texture. But we have no design by Euphronios so delicately adjusted, so sensitive, so fitted to its place on clay, as the *Dionysos* of Exekias. Already in coming to the greatest master of the red figure period, the student is on the downward slope of the art as stylized design, as decorative art fitted to ceramics.

Illustration becomes more exact. It is often spirited and gay, even dramatic. Individual psychology enters in facial expression and revealing gesture. But the method is exhibitional, showy, tending toward a sort of draughty virtuosity.



*Amazon on Horseback* So-called "plastic vase" nyrton 450 B.C.  
 [Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

With Euphronius should be mentioned Duris Euthymides and Pamphæus as celebrated masters (Euthymides inscribed one of his vases with the line, "This outdoes Euphronius," which indicates that Euphronius is the real master) Sosias and Brygus did more to develop expressiveness through gesture and facial play. Brygus is known particularly for specializing in subjects considered today unpermissible. And indeed the satyrs and maenads do, on some of the most beautifully engaging vases, indulge in revels less than conventional.



Redrawing of design on an Attic red-figured hydria  
 [A Furtwangler and K. Reichhold *Griechische Vasenmalerei*]

These are all artists of the period termed by authorities the very apogee of the art, about 500-460 B C. Walters finds the drawings before 500 B C stiff and severe, and notes that "the *fine style* (about 460-440 B C.) exhibits the culmination of technique and composition." F. A. Wright speaks of the red-figure vases as "the crown and triumph of Athenian pottery," and adds that with Brygos "all traces of archaism have disappeared and we see the full maturity of the art." It seems to this observer, however, that vase-painting had then already entered upon its period of decadence: design had weakened, ornament was on the downgrade toward the florid, representation toward the sentimental, the theatrical, and the grandiloquent. The early unity, the focus, the crisp stylization, were gone.

For a time, parallel to the red-figured ware there flourished in a minor way

a type of vase with line-drawings on a white ground, on a white 'slip' as the all-over coating of white paint is called. These are less successful decoratively but are of exceptional interest as an indication of the methods and ability of easel painters of the time. The pictures—and one assumes that the white was introduced for more facile picturing—vary from a few examples in the early formalized technique to a late realism. In examples of the latter, Greek draughtsmen prove their ability to accomplish in outline a marvellous accuracy combined with a beautiful economy. Here the classically pure outlines of Euphronius are freed from the red black complex to stand out naked on the white vessel. As a matter of fact there was wider experiment with colours though in restricted amount both in touches of line and in occasional washes of tone red purple green or blue.

Vase-painting persisted literally for centuries after the period of the known masters in Greece and her colonies and down into Roman times. There was a period during which the pottery of Greek communities in Southern Italy—Tarentum and Paestum—was more popular and more famous than the products of Hellas itself. But the urge toward grandeur and gaudiness and the taste for realistic and literary picturing had degraded the art. Integrity and creativeness alike had fled. The story of a distinctive and once vividly expressive art closes in a record of protracted degeneration and careless repetition. The best was past by 500 B.C. The great proportion of acceptable work was completed before 400 B.C. After that, centuries of twilight, then undisturbed night.

Greek sculpture in other days praised and exalted, even revered, has suffered more than any other art phenomenon a decline under the reappraisal of values in the twentieth century. It is not that Greece fails to afford a very long series of enjoyable works, from near primitive figure to late Tanagra statuette. But the myth of world pre-eminence has been punctured. The worshipful prayers of praise are now recognized as having emanated from critics and observers of intellectualist eras when the formal values of Egyptian and Oriental sculpture were being overlooked, and a strict canon of naturalism was applied as the primary test.

Greek sculpture has usually been described in two categories. The first, termed Archaic, covers the time from the beginnings to the crisis of the Persian Wars. It includes, roughly, the sculptors from the unnamed primitives to the immediate predecessors of Phidias. The second covers the period



Archaic statue of type known as "Kores" Acropolis Museum  
[Alinari photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

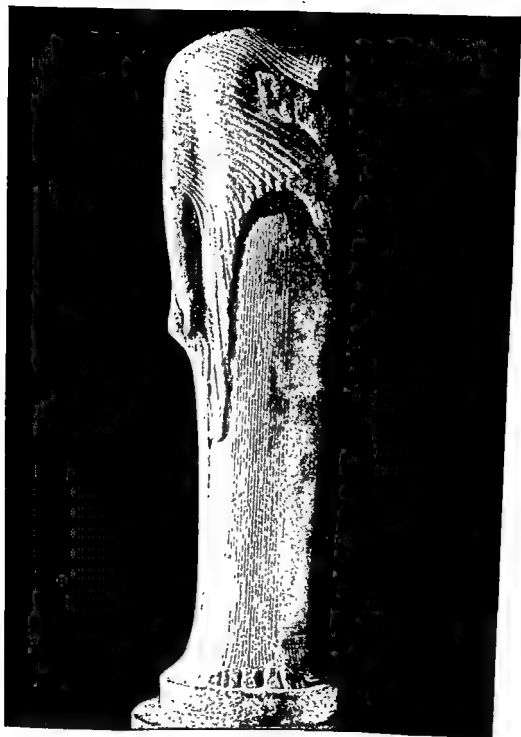
of perfection," 460-320 B C, including the "great" achievements of Phidias and the other fifth-century practitioners and their fourth-century successors. After these two divisions, of course, there was a minor one, the decadence in the Hellenistic era. In this almost universally accepted classification, the implication was that Archaic Greek works were immature, inept, and inferior, by reason of the sculptors' inability to render counterfeits of the human body accurately, to compass sentiment and character and episode. Beginning with Phidias, Greek mastery was considered complete.

Today, after twenty years of revaluation, the two categories are as useful as ever, but with this difference: what has been termed Archaic is now understood to include the best of the Greek achievement. It is now believed that, when the masters of the age of Phidias "freed themselves of the feel of the block," they left behind one of the truest assets of the glyptic artist. They then initiated sculptural illustration in place of sculptural creation. Remembering that some of the greatest work was carried on over into the transitional period of 480-450 B C, one may say that Archaic Greek sculpture marks the strong, valid youth and maturity of the art, the Phidian era the beginning of a long decline.

In that early Greece of growing communal consciousness, of expanding commerce, of union in religion and games: when already a national style was forming in the ceramic art, when the literature of Homer and Hesiod and Pindar was being diffused, in that formative seventh century there was no sculpture—or none that lived importantly. The old Aegean peoples had never excelled in the art. There is hardly a thread of influence that comes down from the lonely lions of the Mycenaean gate. What evidence there is concerns a handful of little cult images found at Olympia: equally rude bits from the Cycladean Isles and scattered votive and genre statuettes of no statable style or identifiable likeness.

The true origins, outside the racial genius that is to make Greek art distinctive, are to be found in Hellenic colonies—if they may be considered such before Greece itself is really formed—over toward the Orient, and in Egypt.

Wilenski states categorically that "for three hundred years, from about 750 B C., the forms of Greek art were derived from the art of the Egyptians." The "Hellenists" deny any outside influence. A cautious middle course seems likely to bring one nearer the truth. The Archaic Apollos inevitably suggest Egyptian prototypes. But Greece is already marking out the distinctive excellencies, and the limitations of a sculpture of her own.



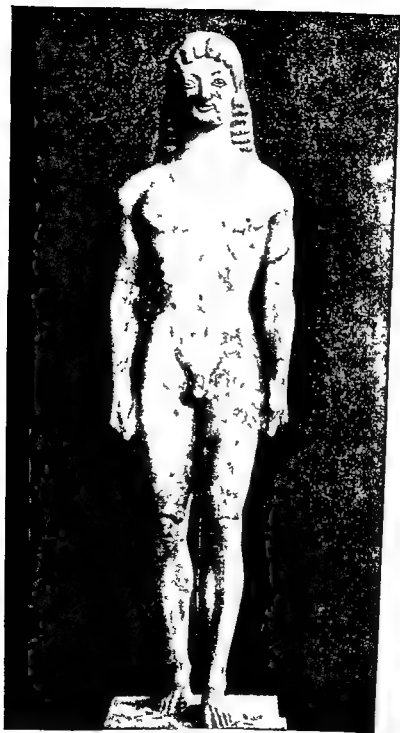
*Hera of Samos. Louvre*  
[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]



Egyptian portrait statue Old Kingdom supposed prototype of the Greek Apollos  
*[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

Cyprus partly Hellenic through the old Mycenaean line partly Orientalized has a place in the story of the emerging Greek consciousness Ionia too closer to the motherland in spirit though actually on the Asiatic coast is doubtless a bridge from the East Local Greek sculptors manufacturing rude votive figures even idols, for obscure temples must have had in the seventh century an increasing number of models from countries where sculpture already was familiar



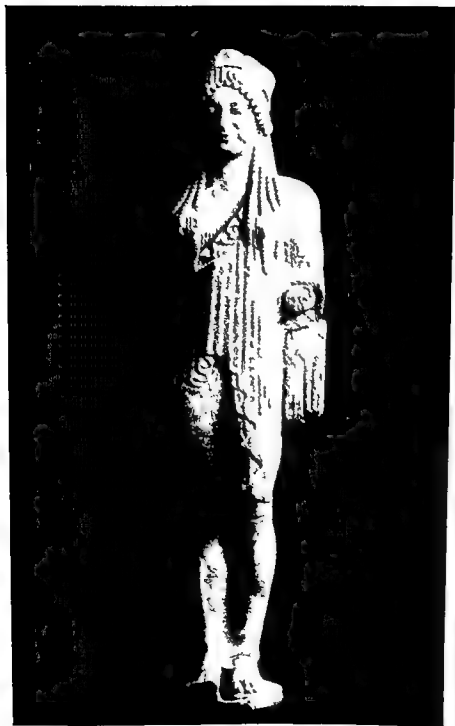


*Apollo of Tenos Glyptothek, Munich*  
*[Photo courtesy German Railroads Information Office]*

In any case the history of the art as Greek in any important sense begins with the early sixth century. The so-called *Hera of Samos* in the Louvre, colonial-Ionian in provenance, is an exceptional thing, with a fine architectural unity and an exquisite grace. The loss of the swellings of the body in the column-like sheathed figure is more than compensated for in an architectonic lift and suavity. There is, no doubt, an Egyptian rigidity or solidity, and an Oriental touch in the formalization, but the grace and the atmosphere are Greek. It may be remarked that Athens was probably little more than a collection of villages, inartistic and unprogressive, at the time this was made in a "colony."

The free-standing Apollos, however, are the type exhibit of sixth-century achievement. The figure is known in a score of variations with the same frontal rigidity, hands at sides, left foot forward, reminiscent of the Old Kingdom tomb statues on the Nile. The formalized hair and fixed smile and accented muscles show slight variations, though of course the quality of the many statues as sheer plastic expression differs widely. The example known as the *Apollo of Tenea*, long familiar because of its place in the Glyptothek in Munich, is one of the most vigorous and impressive. Already the Greek sculptor has advanced over his Egyptian mentors in anatomical truth. There is too a new sort of linear rhythm in the repeated arcs of shoulders, breasts and arbitrarily accented abdominal muscles. For a brief hour in Greek time this playing with rhythmic line will hint of a charming new sort of formalization in sculpture.

The slimmness and fleetness of many of the Archaic Apollos lend colour to the theory that these are not representations of the sun-god but statues commemorating victories of athletes in the national games. The cult of physical perfection had already grown and was bound to have its effect upon artists who traditionally dealt with the human body as their basic material. The immaturity of the art may be taken to explain the long delay in picturing the youths actually at their running and quoit-throwing. The new idea of glorifying the body and its victory took the turn first in the direction of transferring to the marble the fine physique, the alert pose, and the sweetly moulded limb. Idealism was helped rather than hindered by sticking to a traditional regularity. There is perhaps special reason for confounding the athlete figures with Apollo, for he was traditionally the young man's god and himself manifest of the Olympians. To celebrate him in images was to honour the best in physical youth.



Archaic statue Acropolis Museum  
[Photo courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]



*Wounded Warrior* From pediment group Temple of Ægina. Glyptothek Munich  
[Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

The naked athletes were glorified long before feminine nudity (even in art) was allowed by Greek custom and there are no Archaic Aphrodites to match the sixth century Apollos. There are, however, some standardized female figures of the period, and in them the true Archaic conventions are the more pronounced for drapery lends itself to surface formalization, and long hair whether in braids or *en masse*, affords patterned contrast. There is here sculptured enrichment a legitimate decorative idiom, that is to be too soon lost from Greek work too quickly given up in favour of a growing naturalism. It reappears in Etruscan art, beautifully, in an achievement that might have been paralleled in Greece if the sculptors there had not been so soon seduced by an anatomical realism.

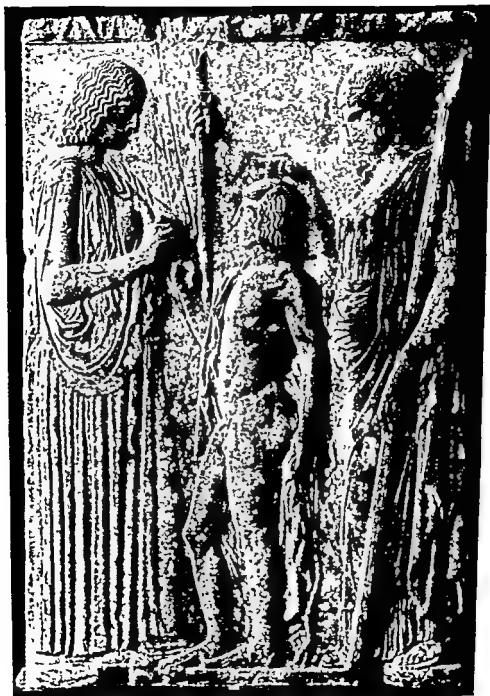
And seduced they were. Perhaps those beautiful bodies, witnessed in every attitude of rest and action at the games had most to do with it. Or perhaps the rationalism of Greek thought the impatient waving aside of the illogical, the mystical the sensuous. Or perhaps the humanism that demanded nothing more of art than an obvious glorification of physical, conquering man.

In any case the next step in sculpture was marked by a further approach to exact bodily representation. The figures of the Ægina pediment are still formalized as compared with the posed-and-photographed gods and heroes of a century later. But already these warriors in the pediment groups have individuality and natural muscles and free movement if a bit summary, the



*Apollo* From pediment group Temple of Jupiter Olympia Olympia Museum  
[Alinari photo courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

approximation to nature is still convincing to the observing realist. In the other direction they retain a typical sculptural blockiness an admirable plastic coherence. Particularly important is this architectonic solidity when as here, the individual figure is integral to a group associated with architectural design. Significantly, the bodies are more thoroughly studied, and more naturally treated than the faces.



*Demeter, Persephone, and Triptolemus Relief from Eleusis, National Museum, Athens*  
[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

From the similar and somewhat later pediment of the Temple of Zeus in the national sanctuary of Olympia, there are fragments that touch close to the high-water mark of all Greek sculpture. The single well-preserved figure, an Apollo that formed the visual centre and main axis of the west pediment group, is one of the most admired of ancient classic marbles. There is a largeness here, almost a dignity of the stone, that will be lost, if not immediately with the passing of the Olympian sculptor (who may have been Alcamenes), then as soon as the Parthenon groups have been chiselled. Certainly this Apollo figure is in itself monumental, firm, almost majestic. The sculpture is alive and strong with its own influent life, it breathes a rhythmic vitality not from the model and not fussed up with detail. Some of the other figures from the Olympian temple, free-standing or carved in high relief, are similarly sculptural and formal, yet with unmistakable marks of the coming transition.

One of the greatest modern critics of world art, Meyer-Graefe, has ventured the unorthodox thought that the Greeks never really mastered sculpture in the full-round, as it was mastered for instance in Egypt. He implies that their genius was rather for relief. From the last decades of the Archaic period dates a series that would be notable in any time or place—the so-called Ludovisi Throne marbles. They are among the most ingratiating and charming things in Greek art, though lacking the early strength and largeness.

The relief method, holding together in panels the complicated design of grouped figures, gives scope to the Greek illustrational impulse without compositional loss. The harmonious grace of the Ludovisi figures—the holding to the panel effect, the adjusted symmetry, the lightly patterned chiselling, seem exceptionally right. Here is formalization, sparingly but beautifully utilized. The bodies are nonetheless solid—finely sculptural. The strong uninvolved torso of the central figure is fully realized. But the frank patterning of the falling draperies, the lightening effect of parallel folds traced over the bodies, is decorative and lyric. The subject is probably the rise of Persephone after her half-year in the Underworld, to bring spring to the earth.

More fully composed, but still holding to certain archaisms—and superior to most of the reliefs that followed in the "Age of Perfection"—is the panel of Eleusis showing Demeter, Persephone, and the youth Triptolemus. It is almost the last flower of the formal method, with already a good deal of softening and rounding of profiles and channels. Nearer to Archaic strength

tion More important are a few larger monuments, such as the *Charioteer of Delphi*, a figure preserved out of a lost group, but sculpturally interesting in its own right—with a column-like lift of body and a general organic simplification, and a beautifully stylized bronze head, wherein there is little sacrifice of sculptural, almost geometric compactness, for natural effect

Less severe, and indeed a very fine example of a plausible truth to appearance modified by artistic conventions, is a solid bronze statuette of a horse now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York There is here a parallel to the stylized illustrations of the black-figured vases The animal is spirited, noble, living The sculpture is controlled, masterly, elegant, massive yet delicately felt.

If the chapter breaks off just short of the Parthenon marbles, without quite completing the story of the strong early sculpture of Greece, and without as yet mentioning Greek architecture, it is because there is a segment of background history to be inserted which may make clearer the place of those things in the world stream of art, and afford a new start toward the understanding of "the Greek miracle" The galvanizing of the national consciousness through victories in the Persian Wars, and the culmination of civic idealism in the Periclean plans for rebuilding Athens, had an epochal effect upon the course of the arts Up to that time the history of the graphic and glyptic arts, matured in many loosely federated centres, had been somewhat disunified, as any account must inevitably be But from about 480 B C. there is a new focus For ill or good, Athens and the Athenian philosophy of art will pick up the Archaic conventions, humanize them and smooth them out, and set Greek sculpture and architecture firmly on the reasonable, intellectual, realistic road



*Greece Culmination and Decline*

**M**ARATHON was crucial. This was the event determining that the West should remain Western. On that battlefield, by so narrow a margin, the tide of the East was turned back, the spirit of Greece was given reprieve, the way was opened to a new freedom.

The issue did not then seem final. The Persians were to return ten years later, to ravage all of Attica and to sack and destroy Athens twice, in 480 and 479 B.C. But at Marathon the Athenians had shown the mettle of conquerors, and had gained inestimably in confidence and belief. Despite the following disaster at Thermopylæ and the evacuation of their city, with the loss even of their temples and sacred citadel, they had discovered the force and power that made inevitable the Athenian successes at Salamis and Platæa. By 478 the new city was being built. This was eighteen years before Pericles came to power.

Athens had never before claimed leadership in the confused and treacherous alliances of Greek city-states and colonies. Sparta had been incomparably stronger. Culturally the islands and Ionia on the Asiatic shore had been more advanced. Lesbos a century before had touched an unapproached height in lyric poetry, Lesbos where Alcæus and Sappho were twin immortals. In philosophy and science, Ephesus and Miletus had been the earlier centres of experiment and development.

In the far West too, particularly in the Sicilian cities, there were then luxurious Greek courts that outshone Athens in all cultural attainments. Sybaris so lolled in the soft refinements and attenuations of art that 'Sybarite' is still our most eloquent designation of the over-cushioned sophisticate. Syracuse had attracted Pindar and Anacreon. Selinus had seven noble temples famous for sculptural adornment. Agrigentum in Sicily and Pæstum in Italy



"Ludovisi Throne" Relief marble. National Museum, Rome  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

and simplicity is the relief of Hera and Zeus which formed one of the metopes on a Doric temple at Selinus in Sicily. There are other temple friezes and panels which, even in a half-ruined condition, indicate a noble ancestry for the later relief figures. The fragments, indeed, return one to the thought that much of the best of Greek sculptural achievement came well before 500 B.C.

After our long training in the orthodoxy of classicism, we of today are shocked by the truth that the Greeks painted their marble statues. The conception of a white purity, an innocent colourlessness—our white-robed angels were like that—was so imbred in us by education, and by the sight of the intellectual *Ledas* and *Ariadnes* of the nineteenth-century neo-classic sculptors, that the thought of highly coloured statues revolted us. But almost universally the ancients added this last unsculptural distraction to the stone surface. In the case of Greece, where colour as an artistic asset was never really understood, the paint coating was, by all the evidence, just plain bad: a few elementary hues, not too carefully assorted, perhaps garishly inharmonious. It is a mercy that the weather of twenty-four hundred years has worn them off.

*Horse Bronze**[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

There is something to be said for the painting of monumental pieces designed to be seen in relation to architecture, incidental to such a highly coloured building as, for instance, the Parthenon. But a study of world sculpture can lead only to the conclusion that the commoner materials of the art, wood and stone, can be capitalized for their own virtues, that there are inherent plastic values in the woodiness or stoniness of the statue—and that in general applied colour is calculated to obscure these.

That a considerable amount of sculpture in wood existed in Greece is certain, although surviving traces are rare. Marbles were commonest. But the Greeks were early masters of the metal processes, and diverting bronze statuettes of the Archaic period are to be found in every representative collec-

were noted for their imposing monuments. Nearer home the arts of architecture and sculpture had been beautifully developed, most notably at Olympia and Delphi, at Ægina too, and at Corinth.

It was destined, nevertheless, that soon there would be no rival to Athens, in political and moral power, in commercial enterprise, in the arts. No one can say what conjunction of circumstances brought these creative and heroic powers to focus. Was it that seafaring men, broadened and made daring by their contacts with all the known world, were now admitted to the councils? Was it that Athens had changed from an agricultural to an industrial and commercial centre? Or was it that the state was ruled by freemen to a greater extent than any yet known to the world?

Whatever the cause, here, in 479 B.C., was the beginning of a release of the artistic impulse hardly paralleled in world history before or after. The art of the theatre was to flower with a noble beauty matched but once in all later time, the philosophy of the intellectual West was to emerge full-grown, and the plastic arts were to develop, in one direction, to a perfection of statement not to be surpassed—all within a half-century. This is the home and the hour of Æschylus and Socrates, of Sophocles and Euripides and Herodotus, of Phidias and Callicrates and Aristophanes.

No one can know how much the patriotic passion and executive genius of Pericles, who came to power in 460 B.C., had to do with the Athenian flowering. Contemporary historians and estimates are necessarily conflicting. Certainly Pericles was generously and understandingly a patron of the arts. To call this the "Age of Pericles" is perhaps to transfer too much praise from Æschylus and Socrates and Ictinus to an organizing overlord. But without Pericles and without the salon conducted by his beautiful mistress, Aspasia, the art life of the city would have been less focused and the appropriations less princely. Even in his patriotic speeches he did not forget the glory brought to Athens by her artists. It was when paying tribute to the soldier dead that he said, with true Greek moderation: "We love beauty without being extravagant, and we love wisdom without being soft."

The beautification of Athens was undertaken in a comprehensive way. It was not a matter of statues to be set up here and there, or of a single temple to be erected. The city was to be made worthy of her destiny. She was to shine out unmistakably as the capital of the confederation of Greek city-states, of all the non-barbarian world. That the leadership was never wholly acknowledged, that the member states were taken aback when Athens decided

to beautify herself with funds out of the federation's war-chest, was a mere political circumstance. Artists were given unprecedented opportunity, with results to be seen most remarkably in the Acropolis and its crowning building, the Parthenon. Here is Greek architecture come to its most perfect expression, and Greek sculpture finding its supreme setting.

Time was when men regarded the Acropolis, and with it the whole Periclean achievement in art, as a miraculous outflowing of the creative spirit due to the artists' first escape from enslavement under kings and priests. These critics glorified Greek freedom in contrast with Egyptian thralldom, Western rationalism as against Eastern mysticism, Hellenic clarity and humanism as against Nilotic heaviness and Nilotic forebodings of the hereafter. It now begins to appear that they may have been celebrating mythical superiorities. In the light of history restudied, and of a fresh appraisal of all art values, critics have reversed the judgment that would accord Egyptian sculpture of the Old Kingdom a place aesthetically inferior to the Athenian achievement. Nevertheless, we may still see today, in the Acropolis, a culmination of one way of expression, a climax in ancient world art, a typical expression of the Greek spirit. It demands sympathetic interpretation and it richly repays study.

Greek architecture, surviving almost solely in temples, is perhaps the most distinctive in history. A single type of construction is utilized within a single logic of planning, and the ornamental conventions are few and unmistakable.

The origins are to be sought less in the earlier Aegean building of the same lands than in the Oriental cultures that poured their influences into the Greek settlements along the shore of Asia and thence into Hellas itself. The Aegean world had known elaborate and imposing palaces, but these lacked every fundamental that entered into Greek planning. They were asymmetrical, without unity, their decorative features were applied superficially. It is futile to search in them for hints of the Greek integration that emerged a millennium later on the same soil.

Logic and order are at the heart of Greek expression. The Hellenes planned their temples according to a coded schema of parts, based first on function, then on a reasoned system of aesthetic and decorative enrichment. Mathematics determines the symmetry, the harmony, the satisfaction of the eye.

There had never been an architecture in just this sense. The pyramids had been an early, unadorned fruit of the same spirit. But in matured, thought-

reason of Assyrian influences. When the Ionians refined the feature into something distinctively their own, they carried it back to the Athenians, who were their blood brothers.

Because many of the finest fragments of ancient architecture survive in the form of single columns or bits of colonnade, it is not unreasonable to expect the trained eye to know the characteristics of the "orders." Even though we no longer accept the dictum of their unmatched perfection, the Doric and Ionic columns have character and even grandeur, and not seldom an abstract sculptural beauty. The Doric usually stands without a base and is fluted or channelled. Oftenest there are twenty flutings or sides, but examples with twelve, sixteen, eighteen, and twenty-four channels exist, and there is a simple unadorned capital between column and entablature. The column's height is four to six and one-half times its diameter at the base. The column departs from the straight, with a slight swelling at the centre known to architects as the "entasis." The Doric is simple, strong, compelling. It lends itself little to variation. Its exact values may have come down from the time of archaic pillar-worship.

The Ionic, on the other hand, modifies power with grace and appears in many pleasing variations. It is slenderer, it stands on a ringed base, and it carries a capital with a delicately carved volute decoration. The height of the whole is about nine times the diameter of the column at the base. The shaft oftenest has twenty-four channels.

The Greek temple as we know it is obviously the ripe fruit at the end of a long development—the matured expression after centuries of trial and of crystallizing tradition. But its ancestry is no longer traceable in actual examples. There are no existing forerunners of the Greek stone temples. It is now possible, however, to trace their style back, by evidence of construction methods and vestigial remnants, to similar buildings in the more perishable and more primitive materials. The belief that Greek stone architecture is perfectly logical is not a little shaken, indeed, by the discovery that its ornamental idiom grew out of an earlier functional treatment of the wooden members. Most notably, the Doric entablature regularly includes, above the architrave (or first cross-beam), a frieze which is broken by slight projections called "triglyphs," representing ornamental approximations of the old wooden roof-beam ends. There are other ornamental bits suggesting the earlier wooden peg-ends. Indeed the whole roof structure seems logically designed for timber construction.

There is, moreover, historians' evidence of a change from the one material to the other. The columns of the Temple of Hera at Olympia had originally been of wood. As they decayed, stone ones were substituted. Pausanias recorded that one of oak still was doing duty when he visited Olympia in the second century B.C. These facts seem particularly worth noting because of their contribution to one of today's generalizations. They demonstrate the truth that behind all ripe *styles* there is an evolutionary process traceable to crude use-forms and archaic implements.

The ancestry of the Greek temple form is uncertain. The most plausible inference is that the Doric temple developed out of the early Greek house form. At any rate the porched building on a rectangular platform is standard. Greek religion did not demand that the temple be a congregating place. Worship was ritualistic and celebrative, and involved no indoor meetings and sermons, the priests were hardly more than guides to successful ways of sacrifice. The temple home of the god or goddess was for glorification, a superb offering to the deity and a reminder to man.

Outwardly the temple was a dignified colonnade on a platform several steps high. Within was a windowless hall, the sanctuary, containing the sculptured image of the god, with an end door from the porch. A second room, perhaps a treasury or offering-chamber, commonly backed up to the sanctuary, with a door to the far porch. At first perhaps temples had been a single chamber with one portico; then with a portico at each end, then the colonnade was carried all around. From this, evolution went on in some cases to continuous two-aisled colonnades. The altar for sacrifices was outside the building, before the sanctuary porch, in an open-air sacred enclosure.

Grandeur still resides in the remains of Doric temples at Agrigento, Paestum, Corinth, Sunium, and Segesta, but the Parthenon is the supreme example of mature Doric architecture. The Acropolis, the hilltop on which the Parthenon stands, gains, by its lift above the plain and the common city, a dignity, a noble remoteness. The group of buildings there, all of a certain magnitude, undomestic and impersonal, affords one of the earliest examples of city-planning comprehensiveness. As a matter of fact the living quarters of the city below were probably of the meanest, and certainly were unsanitary, haphazard, and far from being designed by artists. But the combined shrine and citadel on the hilltop, and the public buildings at the edge of the steep slope, were together one of the glorious spectacles of Greek civilization.

The Parthenon rises above its fellow-temples by right of—what? There is only one answer—more art. The Doric columns, incomparably simple and effective, have become slenderer, but without loss of reposeful strength. The proportioning of façades and of parts is exquisite. How far from casual is such an effect one may learn from the Theseum, the comparatively lifeless Doric temple in the plain below—a second-rate achievement, but notable as the best-preserved example of ancient Greek building.

It was a Greek sculptor, not an architect, who said that "successful attainment in art is the result of meticulous accuracy in a multitude of arithmetical proportions", but the Parthenon is the aptest illustration. Every esoteric scholar delving into the mysteries of "the divine proportion" or "the golden mean" claims the Parthenon as his first example—it has so unfailingly pleased millions of eyes, and it measures out so exactly to a mathematical formula. In the whole aspect there are calculated proportionings of parts and rhythmic correspondences. Then on from the whole to the parts—the areas of the entablature are divided on logical and harmonious ratios, and of course there is the equally refined relationship of column and capital. Perfection within perfection!

These refinements and mathematical adjustments add up to one of the most moving manifestations in the realm of building. Experience confirms the expectation of the mind, the mind that knows that everything reasonable has been done to make the building "perfect." After all, one concludes, intellectualism has its place in art. The mental calculations have contributed to magnificent 'building form.' The relationships of breadth to height, of part to whole, of unbroken shaft or smooth architrave to decorated members, are within a unity, clear, logical.

Note, too, how naturally the rhythm is initiated and held. The long low steps covering the transition from ground to building, giving stability but making the clean break between nature and structure, then the powerful unimpeded lift of the rhythmic shafts, the first cross-member clear and strong, doubly emphasized, and above that, all the frankly decorative elements gathered—disposed in geometrically bounded areas. There is here, despite the survival of wood-age thinking—a sufficient expression of function and structural method and material. The elements of support in relation to downpressing weight, and the methods of engineering, are externalized without disguise or excessive tracing over.

An age fond of symbolism found in the Greek temple a concrete illustra-





The Parthenon

[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

tion of moral and spiritual truth, and an expression of the Greek character. The solid foundation platform, the down-pressing mass of architrave, frieze, and roof-structure, counteracting the otherwise too powerful sense of lift, the serenity of the colonnade, modified by the exuberance of sculptured frieze and pediment—all this is seen as an analogue of the Greek combination of freedom and restraint, of perfectly poised aspiration and reason, of invention and discipline. The columns, some say, mark the rise toward truth or perfection, but the downbearing weight restores balance, caps the too-aspiring lift. Thus Fate stops the too presumptuous human reach. Here is the architectural emblem of the Greek philosophy of poise, thoughtful discipline, and restraint.

It is doubtful whether the artist busy with building ever thinks so directly in terms of symbolism, illustration, or allegory, but subconscious forces are probably at work to render any inspired work of art an externalization or a revelation of racial temperament and national thought. For those who find

their pleasure heightened by discoveries of symbolism, these speculations may be useful and welcome. Seldom have they had so clear a demonstration in architecture.

The Greek builders, in their search for "perfect" expressiveness, went on to optical refinements unparalleled elsewhere. The entasis, or slight swelling and recession of the profile of the column, was but one of the mathematical tricks to ensure in the beholder's eye the illusion of perfect straightness or exact regularity. Another was that the tops of the columns lean slightly toward the centre at each side of the colonnade, the inclination increasing in proportion as they are further toward each end, because a row of columns which are actually parallel seems more widely spaced at the top corners. (The Parthenon columns of the outer colonnade are inclined, curiously enough, at such angles that all their axes would meet, if continued, at a point one mile up in the air.) Another concession to the eye is the slight curve upward at the centre of the horizontal lines, made because straight steps or straight-set series of columns seem to sag slightly at the centre.

These are, of course, intellectually argued refinements, all premised on the idea of mechanical exactitude as ideal. In nineteenth-century intellectualized or scientific estimates of art, they were held up as the ultimate example of creative subtlety, and indeed they constitute an extraordinary, an almost unique instance of refinement in technique. But a generation less committed to the rational approach is less convinced that the eye craves the illusion of mechanical exactitude. There may be little more reason to correct the seeming curve in a colonnade than to straighten the free-hand lines in a painting by use of a ruler. Mechanically justifiable rules may limit a work while endowing it with a certain sort of perfection. Nevertheless, the very existence of such visual refinements affords one of those teasing questions which, in the pondering, may well increase the observer's understanding of architecture.

Whether or not the sloping columns have essentially to do with it, the Greek temples have a sense of stability with vitality. The Parthenon breathes a deep nobility. It is the final flower of a simple, clearly understandable building development. The abuse of the ages has not destroyed its larger dignity and inbuilt grandeur.

The ornamental features, too, are in general enriching without denial or obscuration of structural truth. The fluting of the columns affords grace and vibration to the otherwise stolid shafts, but the channels reinforce rather than cut across support lines. The frieze is lifted above an architrave kept un-

adorned, preserving cross-bar strength. The transitional members, capitals and mouldings, agreeably soften the profile angles without loss of firmness. Supports are cushioned but without undue softening. Just how great and distinctive are these achievements may be seen by contrast when the insensitive Romans pick up the Greek elements and use them grandiosely and thoughtlessly, vulgarizing the ornamental features.

Before turning to the sculpture of the Periclean age—most beautifully represented in the Parthenon—it is well to glance very briefly at the other architecture of the era. While the Doric mode of building seems the typical Greek expression, on account of its greater strength and restraint, the Ionic was hardly less cultivated at this time, and its more appealing gracefulness contributed to the gradual passing of the Doric idiom.

The Ionic expression had already taken form in systematic practice in an exactitude almost as rule-bound as that of the Doric. But the builders of the Erechtheum on the Athenian Acropolis, just after Pericles' time, found occasion to modify the standard plan, and to refine upon the decorative features. There had been pretentious and beautiful temples in the Ionian homeland. In the Asiatic cities of Miletus, Ephesus, and Priene there are examples dating from the fourth century. At Olympia in Greece proper there was a celebrated Ionic temple. On the Acropolis itself the little shrine of Athena Nike, or Temple of the Wingless Victory, utilized Ionic elements. But the Erechtheum, though a variation of the usual arrangement of parts due to the necessity of covering certain bits of ground already sacred and to the requirements of several divinities, is representative of the special features of the mode at its best. The almost fragilely graceful columns are here, the less severe massing, the breaking up of the entablature into more delicate units, and the general lightening of effect and greater enrichment by applied ornamentation. The East Porch (now more or less restored) is, like the Parthenon, Greek architecture at its purest. The doorway within the North Portico has served a thousand architects as classic model in later ages and assorted climes.

The South Porch of the Erechtheum followed an innovation already seen at Delphi. Six statues of maidens known as Caryatids took the place of the conventional columns. The experiment leaves the building somewhere between architecture and sculpture, and the result is interesting as a novelty rather than for any defensible daring or good purpose in the building art. The statues very likely serve their purpose as supports today with more architectural plausibility than they could have done in the days when their

arms, noses, and other members had not been shorn off. Even so they are a bit ludicrously natural and unmathematical. As the Greeks failed here, so they often enough failed elsewhere. The monuments they left are not always the matchless and perfect compositions we have been led to believe by other generations.

It is perhaps a limitation of our own generation that we are made uneasy by the fact that the Greeks regularly painted their marble temples in polychrome. The whole truth is that they seem not only to have painted them, but to have used gaudy colours for the purpose, indulging generously in red, blue, and gilt. There must have been some endeavour to correlate colour and structure, with the structural members kept clear and outstanding, the lower parts little coloured, and the upper parts alone flowering in hue as they did in sculptural adornment. But every credible attempt at reconstruction of the half-ruined buildings has resulted in models overheavy and disturbingly unarchitectonic, or excessively traced over and florid, and we can only conclude from evidence at hand that in these later centuries the temples have gained in dignity and repose as they have lost colour and some of the profusion of their ornament. The over-ornateness may have existed only in the age of decadence, but that means that the decline had appreciably started well before the Golden Age of Pericles, Phidias, and Ictinus.

The third Greek "order" is obviously a fruit of the decorative spirit. It has no ancestry in engineering or logical calculation. The Corinthian style is hardly more than the Ionic with a showy capital. Within widely different variations there is retained some echo of the volute form in combination with acanthus-leaf foliation. It is related that Callimachus, a sculptor, saw a basket embowered in an acanthus plant and straightway was inspired to create this third order, exactly as nature had designed it. It is the realist's substitute for calculated and formally conceived art.

The Corinthian mode, to the credit of the Greeks, made little headway in Greek times, except as incidental innovation, where a second order was needed for variety within a Doric or Ionic temple or gateway. The Temple of Zeus Olympus (never finished) was an exception in Athens. The Roman architects, filled with the spirit of imperialistic aggrandizement, took the Corinthian mode for their own. Greece went on using the acanthus motive, incidentally, for widely varying ornamental purposes.

When one has the temples, one pretty much has Greek architecture. The famous Propylæa on the Acropolis was a monumental temple-like gateway,



*Ionic Temple of Athena Nike the Acropolis, Athens*

with a main passageway between colonnades, flanked by minor porticoes, in Doric style, as befitted the approach to the Parthenon. The Monument of Lysicrates of the fourth century, is a graceful, useless composition in round temple form with engaged Corinthian columns. It has been extravagantly praised by eclectic architects but it is hardly to be placed beside the earlier strong and characteristic expressions of the Greek spirit. The theatres in the fifth century were unadorned with great simple bowls of concentric terraces and an unpretentious, perhaps temple-like stage building.

In the centuries following 400 B.C. architecture rapidly lost both its strength and its purity. The next major step was Rome's adoption of the Greek decorative elements, and her adaptation of them to all sorts of functionless and inappropriate ornamental purposes, on buildings constructed with the un-Greek arch and vault.

Sculpture was in the Periclean age the premier art among the Greeks, partly, no doubt, because it the more perfectly echoed human physical perfection, because it was understandable within the cult of the athlete. In an age when this art predominated—Phidias, a sculptor, was general superintendent of the planning and building of the Parthenon over Ictinus and Callicrates, the supposed architects—it is to the credit of the reasoning Greek artists that the principles of building were so little obscured behind sculptural decoration or illustration. In general the bases of the structure, the weight-bearing members and the first horizontals, were kept clear of elaboration or figuring. In the Parthenon and earlier calculated structures, it was deemed that the proper place for exterior sculptures was in the spaces between the triglyphs, or surviving beam-ends, and in the pediment. On the roof single figures might be set in silhouette against the sky, at gable top and gable ends. Within the colonnade in some late Doric temples a continuous frieze ran like a band around the cella's exterior wall, and was seen in bits from the outside, between columns.

The Parthenon sculptures, described by Pijoan as "in many respects the highest artistic achievement of mankind"—an estimate echoed in numberless critical works—originally appeared on the building in two series, the continuous frieze within the colonnade and the separated panels between the triglyphs, and the two triangular compositions in the pediments. The best preserved of the figures were taken to England early in the nineteenth century, and are universally known, from the name of the man who carried them away in battered remnant form, as the "Elgin marbles."

There is grandeur in the pediment figures. To be judged now only as, literally, individual pieces, they are among the major world examples of monumental sculpture. As in the case of the architectural monument of which they were decorative details, they doubtless have gained, in sheer æsthetic value, by the accidents of time. The sculptors of the Periclean age, judged by all other evidence, may be marked as masters at a stage just after the culminating moment. The largeness, the truly sculptural feeling for mass, remains, but the artist is already losing the sense of this in his preoccupation with detail and elaboration, in fidelity to surface nature and the trick of showy execution. Weather, war, and vandalism, when they have not erased sculptural quality with the rest, have mercifully pared down the heroic figures to a noble simplicity. In any case the eye delights in the sense of contained movement. The tensions between volumes, the powerful plastic



*The Fates From east pediment of the Parthenon British Museum  
[Mansell photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

aliveness, the sweep and force and might, are inescapable. Keats has suggested the effect, better than any of the critics, in his sonnet "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles." The opening lines are given to the far-ranging but nebulous thoughts inspired by the sight: then

Such dim-conceiv'd glories of the brain  
Bring round the heart an indescribable feud,  
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain  
That mingles Grecian wonder with the rude  
Wasting of old Time—with a billowy main—  
A sun—a shadow of a magnitude

The Greek sculptors were seldom masters of magnitude in this sense, and the nude male figures and the veiled female torsos from the Parthenon pediments are to be the more enjoyed because they rise up out of so much that is only naturalistically appealing and graciously expert. The grand votive statues, such as the outdoor *Athena* on the Acropolis and the colossal image of the same goddess in the cella of the Parthenon, were big enough, by all report, but they were distressingly and distractingly overdressed, and their largeness and sculptural nobility were lost in excessive detail. The magnitude of the pediment figures is the magnitude of the powerful in repose, of strength kept simple.

It is a matter concerning scholarship rather than art appreciation that the pediment groupings should be reconstructed on paper and their literary

significance explained. The best is in the fragmentary figures, which never have lost their living sculptural force. They still breathe plastic vitality. But a different sort of rhythm doubtless resided in the total triangular compositions, confined in their architectural frames, and read by the Athenians as story and allegory. The East pediment group represented the contest of Athena and Poseidon over the site of Athens. The West pediment composition illustrated the miraculous birth of Athena out of the head of Zeus.

The technical problem of fitting elaborate sculptural representations within the confined triangular space of a low pediment was one traditionally challenging the inventiveness and logic of sculptors collaborating on temple projects. At Ægina, Olympia, and Athens the solutions seem to have been fittingly balanced, decorative, and of one design idea with the architecture. There was certainly a related flow of movement, within the triangle, which is lost in later examples and in modern imitations.

The panels between the triglyphs under the Parthenon cornice, known as the "metopes," originally ninety-two in number, have been even more disastrously defaced or destroyed than have the pediment groups during their twenty-three centuries of neglect. Each panel, almost square, bore two figures in combat. Sometimes the subjects were taken from history, sometimes from mythology, while others are read today as symbolic of moral conflict. Necessarily the standard of sculptural excellence varied. The problem was an eminently difficult one. That some of the many sculptors employed achieved results approaching the triumphs of the pediment figures is indicated in fragments now in the British Museum or still in place on the building.

The low-relief frieze which runs like a decorative band around the outside of the cella wall, within the colonnaded porch, is of another range of excellence. The subject is the ceremonial procession which was an event of the Panathenaic festival held every fourth year. The figures in the sculptural field, which is a little over four feet high and no less than 524 feet long, are mainly those of everyday Athenian life. Even the gods shown receiving the procession, are intimately real and folk-like, though over-size. To them goes all the world of Athens: priests and elders and sacrifice-bearers, musicians and soldiers, noble youths and patrician maidens.

There is a casualness about the sculptured procession, an informality that would hardly have served within the severe triangle of the pediments. Everything is flowing and lightly accented. Particularly graceful and fluent are the portions depicting horsemen. The animals and riders move forward rhyth-





Figure, from east pediment of the Parthenon *British Museum*  
 [Mansell photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

mically, their bodies crisply raised from the flat and undetailed background. The sense of rhythmic movement, of plastic animation within shallow depth limits, is in parts of the procession superbly accomplished.

There are panels on other buildings of the period which serve to support the unconventional suggestion of Meier-Graefe, to the effect that the genius of the Greeks was less for sculpture in the round than for relief. One of the figures from the procession carved on the platform of the little temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis goes to prove an almost unique talent for graceful, near-realistic low-relief. The *Maiden Fastening Her Sandal* lacks, to be sure, the strict formalization that makes the best of Egyptian relief sculpturally appealing, a quality found in somewhat lesser intensity and rigidity in certain archaic Greek works. But where has a figure stood out from its involved swirls of garment with so sweet a flow of line, so graceful a harmony of linear rhythms? It is realistic: the loveliness of woman and the play of textiles have been observed and recorded. The conception is not essentially

sculptural. The artist has overcome his marble rather than sought to reveal the virtues of its intractability (which we now conceive as essential to the spirit of the sculptor's undertaking where he utilizes hard materials), but where in the long history of art is a figure more ingratiating and delightful?

A few, a very few of the Greek grave-monuments so common in our museums have a hint of the same grace and charming fluency. Oftener than not, however, they are wooden and over-detailed and not infrequently they reek with sentimentality and literary allusion. They are soft, gentle, and a measure too sweet.

There is nothing in the range of world art so overpraised as Greek sculpture in the round as achieved in the Periclean Age and after. If Phidias was nearly so bad a sculptor as is indicated in our two sources of information about his work, that is, Roman copies and descriptions by ancient observers the best had passed before the Periclean period. From these sources it would also follow that Phidias had as associates among his anonymous helpers on the Parthenon sculptors far greater than himself. Not that the Greek historians and reporters failed to praise him as a master beyond all rivalry, but they gave all the wrong reasons: the marvellous lifelikeness of his work, his meticulous attention to natural detail, his tricks of building up effect.

Of the essential sculptural virtues he seems to have been innocent. Formal organization is lacking, the plastic rhythm is weak. Art history may yet be rewritten to show that Phidias was the type figure of the political sculptor, not inventive, never himself creating an æsthetically valid composition, but figuring rather as a great executive able to hold together a large group of architects, builders and sculptors until the collective glories of the Parthenon emerged. The thirty-nine-foot ivory-and-gold *Athena Parthenos* must have been a horror, as certainly was the colossal *Zeus* at Olympia. Witness the description by J. C. Stobart<sup>1</sup>:

"The flesh parts were of ivory, the clothing of solid gold on a core of wood or stone. Zeus was of colossal size, forty feet high. On his head was a green garland of branched olive, in his right hand he bore a Victory of ivory and gold, in his left a sceptre inlaid with every kind of metal. On the golden robe figures and lilies were chased. The throne was adorned with gold and precious

<sup>1</sup> In his *The Clay That Was Greece: A Survey of Hellenic Civilisation and Culture*, a work readable beyond most histories and generally excellent, but not escaping, in art judgments, the limitations of that generation which counted the accurate counterfeit the most eminent sculpture.



*Maiden Fastening Her Sa'id Relief Temple of Athena Nike Acropolis Museum*  
[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

stones and ebony and ivory, with figures painted and sculptured upon it. Even the legs and bars of the throne were adorned with reliefs. Round it were low screens, blue enamel in front, and paintings by the sculptor's brother, Panainos, at the back and sides. The stool on which the god's feet were resting was adorned with figures in gold, the base on which the throne rested, likewise."

Every copy and reconstruction of these popular masterpieces indicates that the description is all too true. This was Greek sculpture already naturalistic, literary, and florid. It is said that about a score of works have been identified as indubitably by Phidias. Hardly one is above a competent standard of realism.

One of the first of the realistic school of sculptors was Myron. His *Discus-Thrower* is superior to any work safely to be ascribed to his contemporary, Phidias, if only in the linear composition and the enclosed movement. Myron carried on the typically Greek tradition of athlete-glorification. The *Discus-Thrower* is known today only from a Roman copy, but is probably a fair illustration of the artist's style, because we know that he was praised in his own time for his exact and unprecedented representations of moving figures of athletes and animals. Where repose of the body had been earlier thought of as the sculptural thing, there was now initiated a cult of action. The way to the *Laocoon* had been opened.

The anatomical truth and idealized athleticism of Myron's figures are perhaps truer to the Greek mind than were the archaic Apollos and the heroic pediment figures of the Parthenon. Certainly they were truer to any theory of art formulated in Greek times. The characteristic attitudes of the racer, the boxer, and the discus thrower were fixed, it might be at the instant of strain. Sculpture is far from formalization here. It is already well on the road that will end in genre and in melodrama. And Myron was the contemporary of Sophocles, dramatic poet in whom grandeur and an impersonal elevation evoked the profound æsthetic response, who rose above every photographic irrelevancy of time and place.

Polyclitus was the third celebrated sculptor of the fifth century. His interest in anatomical truth and athletic idealization went so far that he wrote a treatise on the subject. By way of illustration he made a statue of the ideal (male) figure, and this "model" became a bone of contention in the Athenian art world. But Polyclitus is reputed to have avoided the attitudinized and strained poses of Myron's work. And indeed there is, comparatively, a wel-

come calm in the *Maiden at Munich* which is ascribed to him or his school

The story of free-standing sculpture from the opening of the fourth century into the Hellenistic times of Alexander and down to the coming of the Romans is a record of the narrowing of the never very broad æsthetic into the most cramping of all conventions, the convention of naturalism. Concerned almost solely with the human figure as such, from archaic Olympian runner to smooth photographic Venus and cruelly frank market-woman, the sculptor followed a course toward greater and greater circumstantial actuality. He lost the virtues inherent in his marble and his tool and gained the shallow appeal of the illustrator in his clever transfers from life and his forced sentiment. His approach always intellectual, was in the end by way of little things such as please little minds: trivialities of everyday existence, the sentimental, the anecdotal, the picturesque. He specialized also in abstractions like Love and Virtue and Abundance.

This was the time marking the full emergence of the scientific spirit. Men were obsessed with the reality of immediate things. Greece had triumphed with the reasoning faculties. She had pushed the aptitudes of her innate intellectual genius to their furthest expression. The Orient, with its mysticism and its non-realistic arts, was alien and barbarian to her.

One of the trends to be observed in fourth-century sculpture is the softening of the gods. The pretty mantelpiece art of Praxiteles offers typical examples. Sculptors' images that had become progressively more youthful, and then effeminate, became, in such examples as his famous *Hermes with the Infant Dionysus*, unmanly and pretty in the extreme. In none but a decadent age would an artist try to put so unsculptural a composition into stone. The separation of parts, the inappropriate light draperies in heavy stone, the painstaking accuracy of delineation in every minor detail all this denies sculptural perception. Vigour and vision and the feeling for the material have all gone.

The same limitations and the same tame virtues of prettiness and diverting charm are in a host of fourth-century statues. Praxiteles was the recognized master of the period. His *Cnidian Aphrodite*—one of the first female nudes typically posed beside an urn overhung with stone draperies—is said to have drawn innumerable ancient sightseers to the little island of Cnidus. (This is the Venus that so long wore a tin skirt in the Vatican Gallery.) The *Young Satyr*, known also as the *Marble Faun*, is a perfect reproduction in marble of

a languorous body, with hair, scarf, and support in wooden contrast. This was traditionally the second of Praxiteles' masterpieces. There was a famous *Eros* too, or Cupid, owned by Phryne, the sculptor's mistress, who had posed for the *Cnidian Aphrodite*.

Another outstanding sculptor was Lysippus, who introduced the trick of placing a small refined head upon a large muscular body. He is said to have produced fifteen hundred statues, "each sufficient to have made him famous." Scopas also was of the school producing athletic and naturalistic figures, but his work was marked at times by a drift into the theatric. The anatomical mastery shown in the works of these typical masters is unquestionable, as we might expect. Their "daring" is sometimes praised because they were willing to attempt in marble and bronze the scattered compositional effects more natural to painting—or photography. Lysippus, a generation later than Scopas, was official sculptor to Alexander the Great.

The gods are then still being idealized, in a facile way. They are shown as more human, in more intimate pose. Portraiture never before very important in Greece, develops rapidly, with a new accuracy. The face is no longer a type but an individual likeness. Though there had been three centuries of nude males in sculpture, the female figure now for the first time commonly appears unclothed. *Aphrodite* becomes a favourite. *Eros* comes in for popularity, and is accounted an amusing addition to the sculptural repertory, is in fact quite in line with an emergent playful conception.

A few statues by unnamed Hellenistic artists have entered too largely into art history to be overlooked. Two have been greatly aided to their fame by events outside the sculptors' calculations by accidents of time. The *Victory of Samothrace* or *Winged Victory* achieves a sense of movement long admired. And indeed the fragment as it stands has in the missing, more than depicted action. There is an inescapable drive, a pleasing fullness. But it is obviously part of an overstudied, over-detailed decadent Greek work. If the missing parts could be restored, they would in all likelihood result in a whole impossibly scattered in effect, with lamps or wreaths to add symbolism to the composition.

The *Venus of Milo* (dated about two centuries after Praxiteles) likewise is the gainer through loss of projecting parts. There are certain easy virtues in the statue as it is in linear rhythms, especially accented in the garment folds and in the transcribed woman's-loveliness of the body.

And indeed the best things in the sculpture of this late Greek period must



*Victory of Samothrace Louvre*

[Alinari photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

be found by a closing of the eyes to formal values and by seeking enjoyment in the model, a non-critical pastime which authoritative students in our times tend to disparage. The beauty is most often the transferred desirable beauty of the female body. There is nothing of the pinched or slender nymph about these Hellenistic Aphrodites or Phrynes. A full-rounded solidly cushioned woman is the ideal. But the softness of the flesh and the enchanting nuances of plane and curve are nonetheless intimated. Abounding health with caress-

ability! With some such subconscious surrender we forget the marble, remember the woman. In this range are the irresistible *Cyrenean Venus* at Rome, the *Niobid* at Milan, and the *Syracusan Venus*.

The famous Pergamene sculptures are illustrations of that other road of decline, into theatricality. The Acropolis at Pergamon, a Greek city on the Asiatic coast, independent after the break-up of Alexander's empire, had been constructed by a community long known for cultural interests, and when in 18 B.C. a ruler decided to celebrate a victory by constructing there a magnificent altar to Zeus, the local sculptors had their supreme opportunity. The architectural features were deliberately dwarfed, and place was made for a gigantic sculptured frieze. Scores of figures in high relief, above life-size, were crowded into the panels. The effect is restless and unarchitectural though decoratively rich as seen from a distance. But the notable thing is the melodramatic forcing of incident and expression. Gods are battling giants—a perfect theme for this disordered, uneasy sort of art—and violence, agony, and stress are depicted with verve and expert sketchiness. It is a summit of vigorous romantic art. The Altar of Pergamon has been set up in a specially constructed museum in Berlin.

The Rhodian school of sculpture, another colonial extension of the Greek, came to the same end. What was long considered its masterpiece, and indeed a masterpiece of world art, the *Laocoön* group, became a *casus belli* among world critics. This ultra-realistic statue, telling the terrible story of the strangulation of the Trojan priest and his two sons by huge snakes, with all the terror, strain, and contortion faithfully rendered, is now recognized on all sides as extravagant and almost absurdly overwrought. Its technique is as forced as its pathos. Even more involved is the *Farnese Bull* group, a celebrated composition of the Rhodian school, now at Naples. Every detail of nature and every exaggerated gesture of life are shown in a piled-up riot of forms.

In one other direction the Greek current trailed off into sterile eddies. The taste for literary and genre bits had asserted itself as early as the period of Praxiteles. In the following three centuries there was time for it to call forth many varieties of intimate sculpture: studies of household living, prettified sentimental incidents, romantic reminders, even satirical comment pushed to the point of caricature. Among the immense number of statues in this field there are some that rise above sentimental or illustrational appeal. The best-known museum pieces, of which casts exist in all galleries, are likely to be





*Cyrenean Venus Detail Museum of the Thermæ, Rome*  
[Alinari photo]



*Niobid Figure from lost group Banca Commerciale, Milan  
[Photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]*

sculpturally the worst the *Boy with a Goose*, the *Runner Extracting a Thorn from His Foot*, the *Capitoline Cupid and Psyche*. Most famous in that series is the Pergamene piece, the *Dying Gaul*. But among the smaller Hellenistic bronzes there are also figures from which the plastic sensibility has not wholly fled, to which a breath of order and formalization has miraculously returned. The Tanagra figurines are a special and appealing group of genre sculptures



*Syracusan Venus Syracuse Museum*  
[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

The miniature statue was no innovation in Greek art there had been the small votive figures before the emergence of the archaic Apollos or youths. One might even go back to Cretan, Mycenaean, and Cypriote prototypes. Nor had terra-cotta, their material, been overlooked by the great sculptors of earlier periods. But Greek statuettes in terra-cotta usually mean to us the genre bits of which the products of Tanagra are most characteristic. There



*Venus Genetrix Museum of the Thermæ, Rome*  
 [Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

are thousands of these extant. They depict the intimate life and everyday interests of the Greeks with a fidelity and an appeal found in no other medium.

Mostly the pieces are of importance as documentary evidence or amusing records of customs, costumes, games, and foibles of Greek women, though there are gods and abstract representations too. As art the Greek genre things are far less important than the Chinese T'ang figurines that started with the

same materials and intention. In fact the best score of Tanagra statuettes one could find in the museums would appear soft and ineffectual in Chinese company.

The Greek examples have been found chiefly in tombs, which some commentators consider sufficient reason for terming them "religious." It is more likely that lay custom (at least in the comparatively late time of the Tanagra industry) decreed that these conventional relics be retained in one's own tomb or offered at the funeral of a friend, without thought of votive service to the gods. There are toys too.

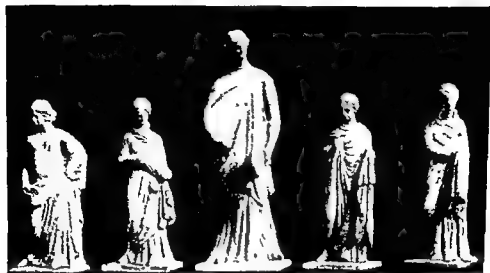
In any case the modern observer is drawn to the crowded shelves of Tanagra and related statuettes as diverting illustrations of the Greek *comédie humaine*. Woman is seen in literally thousands of standing and sitting poses, dressing, promenading, playing games, conversing with friends, nursing children, dancing, lounging, flirting with Cupid, playing with birds. But there are also the allegorical figures and gods and goddesses and, later, nudes. The commonest Tanagra type, however, is the standing woman with ample garments drawn close to the body. The variations of this single mantled figure are innumerable. The grace and charm were enhanced by rich, but now generally subdued, colouring.

The impulse to picture everything, for diversion or offering, gave rise to the widespread manufacture of actors, dwarfs, and dancing girls, even fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Of course Eros came in for increased vogue, in interpretations from the playful and sweet to the lewd. Sculptors not only in Tanagra but all over Magna Græcia (then no longer a political unit) seem in the two centuries before Christ to have catered to this market.

One of the strangest results of the spread of Greek culture in other lands was the crossing of this current with Egyptian run-out formalism, after the foundation and decline of Alexandria.<sup>1</sup> This led eventually to cult images of Hellenized Egyptian gods, as well as to the usual run of genre illustrations and decorative utilitarian objects. At Myrina in Asia Minor the output ran more to divinities, especially those concerned with love. The grotesques, in-

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<sup>1</sup> When the great Macedonian conqueror of Hellas, Asia Minor, Persia, and Egypt founded the world capital at Alexandria, it became a centre of intellectual and scientific advance rather than of art. The world-famous library, the museum that became the equivalent of a university, the laboratories of mathematicians and anatomists and astronomers—all these magnificently served Knowledge. But creative art could not be given new life or revived, not even recent Greek creative art. The best that can be said for Alexandria as fosterer of the arts is that it may have served as a link between dying Greece and growing Rome—and an industrial centre for the multiplication of standard goods.



*Tanagra statuettes National Museum, Athens*  
*[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

cluding comedy actors, were there generously represented too. From the Near East and Egypt to Sicily and Italy and North Africa, the Greek terracotta statuette was familiar. The development merged ultimately with the Roman traffic in household trifles and ornaments.

The coins and gems of Greece afford a pleasureland of miniature sculptural beauty. As in the seals of Babylonia and the gems and seals of the Aegean states, one finds delight in the formalized heads, animals, chariots, and emblems fitted so sensitively and compactly into small confines.

Coinage developed both east and west of Lydia soon after its invention there, supposedly in the seventh century B.C. The designs on the money of the Greek Sicilian cities took on artistic values somewhat before the Athenian sculptors awoke to the opportunity offered in the numismatic medium. The quadriga designs of Syracuse, of the fifth century B.C., are justly celebrated. In general the archaic coins of the sixth and early fifth centuries are superior to those of the Periclean Age and the following Hellenistic and post-Alexandrian periods. The realism of the late portraiture detracts from the formal and properly mathematical design (conditioned by the circular area), and the vigour and dignity gradually fade out. Grace, delicacy, and a flat exactitude are substituted.

The best gold and silver coins have something of the stylization, the sustained rigid mastery of a few volumes ranged in space, which was typical of Exeias's vase designs. The secret lies in the adjustment of volumes to voids, in concentration (since the object is so small), and in an appropriate crisp and vigorous technique. In general the subjects tend to be the portraits of rulers, heraldic emblems, and gods, or important historic characters and events. Each Greek city, in the homeland or Asia Minor or far Sicily, had its own coinage, and the types and individual pieces are therefore almost infinitely varied. In any routine museum collection, one can turn up little masterpieces that are plastically alive and rewarding.

The gems and seals are hardly less varied, though enjoyment of them is made more difficult because the object left to us is usually the incised negative. When this is in translucent stone—as is often the case—the effect can be had by placing the gem against bright light. But usually the values of subject, composition, and workmanship are to be studied only in the positives, taken almost uniformly in plaster of Paris. Again the early or archaic things, generally marked by the scholars as crude and angular, are preferable to the later, more detailed compositions. Ultimately these ran into the florid and insensitive Græco-Roman product, though it is certain that exceptional gems were being made by Greek artists for the brisk Roman trade well into Christian times.

Cameo-cutting was an outgrowth of Greek seal-sculpture—which had, of course, an ancestry traceable back to Cretan art, or, through Ionia and the islands, back to Sumeria. The cameo comes to notice only in the Hellenistic era. Worked in two layers of contrasting colours of stone, it tends to over-showy results. From its miniature forms, it went to larger triumphs in such abominations as the Portland Vase. This celebrated object is a marvel of workmanship, gaudily pretty, but without taste or formal sensitiveness.

Greek painting was wonderfully "artistic" and more advanced than sculpture, if we may trust the testimony of ancient writers. But as they were, in general, historians primarily interested in battles, custom and anecdote, or in intellectual philosophies, there is ground for questioning their æsthetic judgment. The reasons they give for the eminence of the Greek painters are generally unrelated (as are their accounts of sculpture) to the formal values that may have been inherent in the murals and easel pictures.

The elder Pliny, of the first century A.D., gathered within his storehouse of

Certain gorgeously decorative vase-paintings in both the late black-figured mode and the early red-figured, indicate what the virtues of pre-Periclean mural art may have been. Here are the exquisite perfection of line and the singular grace reported by Pliny, within a lingering stylization but built up with eye-filling decorative compositions. The earlier things, before 500 B.C., would be characterized by a stricter formalization, even an elegance, and a flatter technique—which today would seem more suitable for mural painting. The colours would be less natural, more frankly used for heightening the total effect, though never as a very important element, if the vases are to be considered fair evidence. Perhaps the Corinthians, who are supposed to have founded one of the earliest schools of painting, and to have developed a tapestry-like mural-frieze art before illustrational painting came in, retained for a time the subdued rich colour and the sensuous patterning of their seventh-century "Orientalized" vases. But the influence was alien, and doubtless soon went out of painting, as it disappeared from vase-drawing.

It is known that many treatises were written on colouring and other phases of the painting art, *from the fifth century on*. But these, so far as they survive, throw little light on the *quality* of the actual works. We can only surmise the gradual descent into sentimentalism, similar to that instanced in fifth- to first-century sculpture. By the time of the examples now available for study, mostly Egyptian or Italian in provenance, although certainly Greek in execution and spirit, Nature and the intellect have triumphed over formal sensibility. Genre and portraiture are more important than decorative value.

Nor did painting, by its nature so fitted for fluency and the depiction of physical movement, escape the pitfalls of forced action and melodramatic extravagance which were so characteristic of post-Alexandrian sculpture. From Pompeii was taken a large mosaic battle-scene which is reputed to be a copy of a famous fourth-century Greek painting, perhaps by Philoxenus. The transfer from the one medium to the other may be considered grounds for withholding judgment on its colour, drawing or technical proficiency, but the *confused composition, nervous movement, and over-fidelity to non-essentials* suggest the perfect mural analogue to Pergamene and Rhodian sculpture. Actual Pompeian paintings, when not obviously the work of routine decorators and hack artists, seem in general to reflect this popular over-dynamic and over-emotional style.

The rest of the surviving evidence is in the portraiture known chiefly from *examples attributable to the first and second centuries A.D.* Several hundred





Cantharus with painting ascribed to Brygus  
[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

paintings of heads, approximately life-size, have been recovered from Græco-Roman tombs in Egypt. Usually on wood, sometimes on linen, they are notably accurate, competent, and uninspired. Occasionally one rises to psychological insight. A certain freshness and directness prevail. Very rarely there is a flash of rhythmic design or a hint of formal excellence. The exhibit as a whole interests moderns as an indication of the point in technical mastery—in this case in encaustic painting—reached by the late Greeks, rather than as a deeply enjoyable inheritance. The conclusion is inescapable: if great Greek painting existed, it is likely to have flowered and passed before Salamis.

Theorizing usually begins when creative energy has run thin. Critics arrive after the creative culmination. Greek theorizing about art began, in a serious way, during the so-called Golden Age, which was really when the decadence had started. It was, in general, academic, intellectualistic, based on an analysis

knowledge, the *Historia Naturalis*, innumerable records and anecdotes of early artists. To him painting and sculpture were among "the twenty thousand matters worthy of attention." His text is replete with items of this sort (in the translations by K. Jex-Blake).

Polygnotus made a first serious contribution to the development of painting by opening the mouth, showing the teeth, and varying the stiff archaic set of the features. He painted the picture now in the gallery of Pompeii and formerly in front of his Council Chamber, representing a warrior armed with a shield, about whom people argue as to whether he is ascending or descending. The story runs that Parrhasios and Zeuxis entered into competition, Zeuxis exhibiting a picture of some grapes, so true to nature that the birds flew up to the wall of the stage. Parrhasios then displayed a picture of a linen curtain, realistic to such a degree that Zeuxis, elated by the verdict of the birds, cried out that now at last his rival must draw the curtain and show his picture. Apelles' portraits were such perfect likenesses that, incredible as it may sound, Apion the grammarian has left it on record that a physiognomist was able to tell from the portraits alone just how long the sitter had to live or had already lived. He [Peiraikos] painted barbers' shops, cobblers' stalls, asses, eatables and similar subjects, earning for himself the name of "painter of odds and ends." In these subjects he could give consummate pleasure, selling them for more than other artists received for their large pictures.

Practically every shred of direct evidence regarding the art of painting has disappeared, except post-Alexandrian work—preserved mostly on the mummy-casings from Egypt—and a few Roman copies. Nevertheless, the books ancient and recent are full of the praises of Cimon, Polygnotus, Zeuxis, Apelles, and a host of others. The modern who interests himself in art for what it can afford of æsthetic pleasure, and not as historical data, does well to skim over the subject. As he does so, he will doubtless find himself conjecturing thus:

Since vase-painting is likely to have developed parallel with the larger mural art, if not in a sense reflecting the latter's more pronounced characteristics, there was, by the fifth century, a flourishing school of painters. The art had then developed from crude beginnings, through a strong archaic mastery, and was taking on the mellow, softer virtues (and limitations) of Phidian realism. In that case it is a major catastrophe that the larger things corresponding to the vase designs of Exekias and Epictetus and Euphronius have been lost. But we can read only too well, in the descriptions and praises of Pausanias, Pliny, and other commentators, the Hellenistic painters' correspondence to effeminate and "touching" Praxitelean sculpture, with the



Greek and Colonial coins  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

nuances of the model played up to an extreme, probably in combination with some such insensitive conventions as the Alexandrians' wooden treatment of the hair and draperies of their statues. There would be, too, the later swing into vigorously forced emotional expression, overwrought technique matching the straining after pathos.

On the other hand, Pliny recorded that "in ancient paintings the scheme and colouring are simple, without variety of tone, but the lines are rendered with exquisite perfection, thus lending to early works a singular grace. This purity of draughtsmanship was gradually lost and its place taken by a learned technique, by differentiation of light and shade, and by the full resources of rich colouring to which the works of later artists owe their strength." If the Roman reporter had added that the gain meant loss not only of grace and simplicity but of a different sort of strength—formal and plastic—we could credit him with a nice discrimination between beautifully stylized archaism and later popular illustrationalism.

of contemporary works, and blind to the abiding formal values—but illuminating. The keynote of Greek aesthetics was set in Aristotle's celebrated summary, "Art is imitation." Greek art after the so-called archaic period might be epitomized as nature imitated and nature idealized.

Even Socrates seems to have been caught in the limitations of Greek realistic theory. His reasoning is: the artist is to copy what he sees, through knowing many models, he may combine the excellencies of all, and thus arrive at a body nearer ideal, it is better to copy what is beautiful than what is ugly. Plato looked at the art of his time, considered it mimetic in intention and effect, and judged the plastic artist unworthy of a place in the ideal state (There is a suggestion elsewhere that Plato unwarrantedly appreciated the "barbaric" art of the Egyptians, even as we do today. This is a real sorrow to the Hellenists. It may however indicate that one Greek philosopher rose above the limitations of his time and his race, to guess a depth of formal value in art not evident in the works of his contemporaries but glimpsed in alien imported works.)

Aristotle is the typical intellectual critic, the most Greek of theorists, and the one whose opinion has been felt through all after-ages. What damage was done to Western art by parrotings of his facile summary, "Art is imitation," is incalculable.

Art is primarily mimetic, said Aristotle. It must imitate appearances. But the artist's eye must be able to construct nature's ideal out of many observed aspects and details. The work of art is at once a copy and a *correction* of nature. There is, in all Aristotle's words, hardly a suggestion of those values in art which make it a thing separate from nature, or of the experience of order or rhythm which the Chinese ancients, for instance, placed at the heart of aesthetics, and which we, at long last, begin to restore to that place. Aristotle would have Greek youths study art, but only that they might the better judge the perfections of the actual human form.<sup>1</sup>

It is well to keep in mind this aspect of Greek thinking about art. It helps explain why classic art is what it is, why it never rose to the colourfulness and the decorative richness of Oriental manifestations, and why it seldom approached the formal excellence of Egyptian, Chinese, or Javanese art. "Art is perfect when it seems to be nature," wrote Longinus in the third century A.D. The thought echoes up and down the corridors of Greek philosophy and learning, like a refrain.

When Solon travelled in Egypt, a priest there said to him: "You Greeks



Roman copy in mosaic of a Greek painting possibly by Philoxenus  
*Detail Pompeii National Museum Naples*

are children " The later Hellenes could afford to laugh at that good-naturedly and with self satisfaction With their intellect they knew they had carried the arts to a new stage of reasoned perfection More recently the Western Hellenists have laughed with them at the blindness of Egypt.

Today the Egyptian priest's estimate is believed to have truth in it too The Greeks are seen to have been blind to all those forces in life that cannot be identified by the senses and weighed with the mind—the mystic, the spiritual the supersensuous elements that go far toward making art the mysterious thing it is escaping intellectual planning and eluding explanation The Greeks knew little indeed of that wider and more mature world. They were precocious children in the realm they had mastered They did

magnificent things within the clear, light-of-day idioms of realism. They were the world's first great science-bound artists. Later generations owe them a very great debt. But "the Greek miracle" is at last seen as only one of the many in the long history of art, and not, perhaps, the transcendent, the most admirable.



Impression from a Greek engraved gem  
[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]



## *Rome Grand Engineering and Trivial Art*

AND so we come to mighty Rome, conqueror of Gaul and Carthage, of Greece and Egypt, mistress of the Western world through six centuries, capital of the mighty Cæsars, unchallenged home of grandeur, spectacle, and magnificence, splendid with the plundered art of a hundred enslaved peoples, giver of laws and morals and military science to all the West. And yet this "Eternal City" was artistically inconsequential. Except in one direction, grandiose architecture and structural engineering, Rome produced practically no distinctive creative art. The Romans cut off rather than absorbed the one significant development on Italic soil, the Etruscan, and turned to import decadent Greek sculptors, decorators, and painters to give a false Hellenic surfacing to their culture. In the æsthetic scales the contribution of mighty Rome weighs more lightly than that of tiny states like Sumeria and Siena.

Grandeur is Rome's goal, grandeur her one achievement, and perhaps also the secret of the shallowness of her art. The desire to impress by bigness led to magnificent works of engineering and building. But the desire to impress by profusion and pomp led, oftener than not, to adornment of those same works with misused scraps and veneers of Greek architecture and weak imitations of Greek ornamental sculpture. Hellenic moderation and reasonableness became Roman practicality and Roman swagger.

As soon as Rome takes on importance politically and culturally—that is, as soon as adjoining Etruria has been subjugated and Carthage successfully challenged—the spirit that dominates the arts is that of the conqueror and the reveller. Architecture is first, but temples no longer enter importantly into the display. The Forum or trading place, the basilica or public meeting-hall, the baths, the sports arenas, the theatres and circuses, are constructed in

colossal size, and over them is lavished a wealth of ornamentation. Later there are the palaces, triumphal arches, and ceremonial gateways. Sculpture runs to portraiture on the one hand, to satisfying the desire for personal glorification and commemoration, and on the other to a sketchy ornamentation, to surface enrichment of architecture.

The plastic arts are not the only ones thus degraded. The great Greek dramas are occasionally produced through centuries of Roman history, but there is no rival, no successor to *Æschylus*, *Sophocles*, and *Euripides*. Seneca turns their noble vehicle to melodramatic rant. Indeed, the theatre sees little straight drama. The bloody spectacles of the gladiatorial arena and the fights of slaves against wild beasts are closer to the Roman taste. In poetry alone there is a cherished legacy to the later world—*Virgil*, *Horace*, *Ovid*—and in the works of the anonymous architect-engineers. Over all else the militarist, lawyer, and trader exercise their compulsion.

There is a story of a Roman general who, while overseeing the transport of some Greek statues from a sacked Eastern city, shouted to his soldiers and slaves a warning that if they broke these works of art he would keep them at work till they produced others as good. Such was the obtuseness of those who took art to Rome. By the surviving evidence it seems certain that the general's mentality and his attitude toward art were typical of the mass of cultivated Romans. Except for the engineers, the story is one of seizing, borrowing, or buying art, of forcing the artist into imitative service, of parading spoils.

Rome's own leaders, cultural and political, proclaimed that her genius was for other sorts of mastery. *Virgil* wrote in the *Æneid* (in *Theodore C. Williams's* translation)

Let others melt and mould the breathing bronze  
To forms more fair, aye out of marble bring  
Features that live: let them plead causes well,  
Or trace with pointed wand the cycled heaven,  
And hail the constellations as they rise,  
But thou, O Roman, learn with sovereign sway  
To rule the nations.

But having gained sovereign sway over innumerable nations, Rome looked on the bronze or stone faces their artists had made and coveted them, felt without understanding the need for art.

The good old Puritan realist *Cato*, a Roman soldier, moralist, and poli-



tician of the third century B C, complained, in his campaign against women's rights, luxury, and art, of the noxious effect of some Greek sculptures imported from Syracuse. Speaking as Consul, he said to the Roman Senate "Believe me, those statues from Syracuse were brought into this city with injurious effect. I already hear too many commending and admiring the decorations of Athens and Corinth, and ridiculing the earthen images of our Roman gods standing on the fronts of their temples. For my part I prefer these gods." He went on to identify the foreign arts, by implication, with "female luxury." Castigating the women who objected to plain dresses (varicoloured costumes, personal ornamentation, and horse-drawn carriages had been forbidden by law, "except on occasion of some public religious solemnity"), he shrewdly foresaw and described the excessive luxury and show that would follow repeal of the blue laws.

"If, Romans," he said, "every individual among us had made it a rule to maintain the prerogative and authority of a husband with respect to his own wife, we should have less trouble with the whole sex. What motive that even common decency will allow to be mentioned is pretended for this female insurrection? Why, say they, that we may shine in gold and purple, that we may ride through the city in our chariots. Luxury if it had never been meddled with would be more tolerable than it will be now, like a wild beast irritated by having been chained, and let loose the more dangerous."

Livy, the historian who reported the event three centuries later, goes on to say that "next day the women poured out into public in much greater numbers, and in a body beset the doors of the tribunes. nor did they retire until the prohibitions were withdrawn." Thus the dikes against the luxuries, including the arts of the Greeks, were demolished. Thus was illustrated a phenomenon not uncommon in human history: the streams of art and the impulse toward art can be dammed temporarily, by Puritans and hard-headed materialists. The dam will break in due time, and when it breaks there will be a flood not of creative art but of second-hand and showy things—for new creative genius has not been fostered nor invention encouraged.

If Cato was wrong in his basic thinking, there was this much of right in his warning: having eschewed the artistic impulse in her early days, when all energies were being bent to military (and commercial) domination, Rome was certain, once there was a place for the arts, to take up the trivial if not the specious sorts. From no art at all she slid into an art luxurious, extravagant, and decorative. It is the supreme historic example of materialism decking it-

self in the garments it borrows, without discrimination because without understanding. There is something insensitive and orgiastic, from the outside, in the way in which the conquering Roman spreads art around.

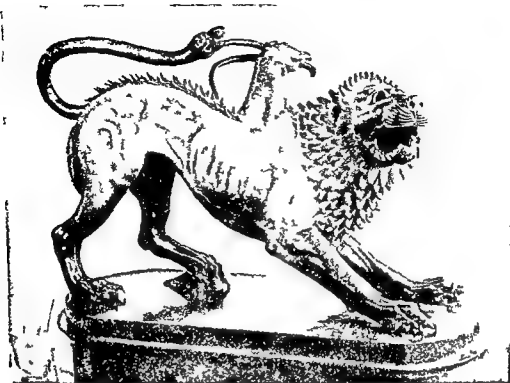
There is room for another view perhaps. Macaulay, writing many centuries later, could express himself with true Catonian contempt: "Leave to the Greek his marble nymphs!" But the modern is the more likely to remember the utter degradation of the Roman theatre, to recall that philosophers were repeatedly banished, officially, from Rome and Italy, and to conclude that the Roman character, brutal, sensual, and practical, had little use for the arts except as diversion or social show.

What, then, was the place of the artists in the Roman so-called "republican" civilization? It is likely that they were little better than slaves. They were assigned the cultural tasks in Roman homes not because they had been known in Athens or Alexandria as leading practitioners of the arts, but because they had been bought or captured in countries celebrated for learning and craftsmanship. Minor personages—musicians, philosophers, procurers, tutors, cooks, schoolmasters, concubines and the like—are reported to have been slaves or near-slaves, and the Roman patrician was not likely to class painter or sculptor higher. In imperial times, however, there will come a rush for culture, with due honour to foreign artists, who will then take their place among the swaggerers.

Rome as a civic entity comes into the light of history in the mid-eighth century B.C. as a trading settlement near the mouth of the Tiber on the western coast of central Italy. Growth and integration are slow in the three centuries following. There are leagues of districts, of the *civitates* of Latium. There is friction with the Etruscans, who occupy adjoining lands, who are already secure in a culture of their own. At times Etruscan teachers, even Etruscan rulers, are imported to Rome, or perhaps force their way in. They are learned from, then discarded or expelled.

Steadily Rome grows. The city's power expands. The practical genius of its people triumphs. Even the sacking of the capital itself by Gauls from the far North, in 390 B.C., is hardly more than an incident, is no real interruption to the nation's march to world power.

Etruria gives in, is vassal to Rome, by 290 B.C. A century of cruel wars breaks the power of Carthage, and that city is finally burnt by the Romans in 146 B.C. In the same year Corinth is savagely destroyed. Greece is already



Chimera Bronze Etruscan 5th century B.C. probably restored in the 16th century  
by Benvenuto Cellini *Etrusca: M. sen. Florent.*

under the Roman yoke as are territories from Spain to Asia Minor. The march of conquest will continue until Egypt and Mesopotamia in the one direction and Gaul and Britain in the other are added to the empire.

At home the barbarian Latins have long since been disciplined, trained into typical Roman civilized ways. Classes of patricians and plebeians after a while forget their quarrelling as prosperity and foreign expansion bring them common benefits. They unite to administer the world's first great republic. The rich rule, plunder, exploit; it is an oligarchic republic. When selfishness and indulgence threaten actually to destroy the state unless a single firm hand is given power, Republic slips over into Empire a few years before Christ is born. Just then, in the Augustan age, Rome is nearest to an art expression of her own.

Even then Rome gains a vast amount of art from the treasures of the Greek world. E. Sellers, in his introduction to *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on*

*the History of Art*, excellently summarizes the matter "From the day when Marcellus had first induced the Romans to admiration of Greek art by displaying the spoils of Syracuse, down to that crowning day of a triple triumph when Caesar Augustus celebrated his victory over the last of the Hellenic powers, statues and other works of art had come to be as much a part of the pageantry of triumphs as captives or military booty. The solemn dedication of these objects in some public building was the natural sequel of the triumphal procession. The great generals of the Republic, and after them the Emperors, had shown themselves zealous for the preservation and arrangement of these collections. Only a short while before Pliny compiled his history of the artists his patron Vespasian had opened the great Temple of Peace, destined with its surrounding Forum to receive, alongside the treasures of the Temple of Jerusalem those Greek masterpieces which the greed of Nero had gathered within the Golden House."

This civilization of the fighter, the conqueror, lasts five centuries before Rome is swamped under the invading waves of Northern 'barbarians', though early in the fourth century a new spirit of Christianity has entered and is officially accepted, spelling a different ideal and a better destiny for Europe, bringing in, too, a faith around which an art, and new uses for art, can grow.

Before Rome emerged politically, and centuries before any art to be termed Roman appeared the Italian people known as Etruscans had their own culture. Originally they had come over to Italy from the Aegean basin probably from the Asiatic side. This was at a time when Greece was hardly yet formed as a state perhaps in the eighth century B.C., and the Etruscans' art, in so far as it is derivative, seems less Greek than Asiatic, Cypriote and Ionic. Their sculpture was important and distinctive they introduced the arch as a structural element into Europe, and in painting and the minor crafts they were expert and inventive. The best of what is called early Roman art is in the contribution of these people of another racial stock who were to be absorbed into the rising Roman state.

Etruria is that portion of Italy sloping from the Apennines to the Mediterranean Sea north and west of Rome and the Tiber. The Aegean invaders had pushed their predecessors in the region to northward and southward, and came to rule a great territory, with many towns, between the Tiber and the Po. They became the ruling caste with doubtless, some of the conquered



*Warrior* Archaic Etruscan bronze  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

Latins living under their sway, and intermarrying to form a people different from the Greeks who were then setting into their own national mould in Ionia and Hellas. That the Etruscans remained Aegean culturally is indicated by their Greek-like written language, their expert technique in metalwork, and the architectural mode that is primarily Asiatic. As time went on, while the true Romans to the south were still barbaric, Etruria kept its cultural



*Warrior Bronze*

*[Courtesy William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City]*

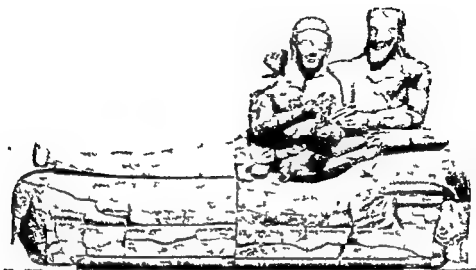
contacts with Athens and Corinth and with the Greek colonial cities then flourishing in Sicily and the south of Italy

Many authorities are convinced that the best in Etruscan art was hardly more than an offshoot of the Greek development, and they point to the recorded exile of certain Greek craftsmen from the homeland cities to Etruria as proof of imported art. But this was a comparatively late incident, and as appreciation swings back to so-called archaic work, it appears that the Etruscans excelled in a very distinctive way, especially in sculpture. Moreover, the common use of the arch in building indicates a branching or link farther back in the Aegean chain.

Some of the early Etruscan sculptures exhibit a consistent formalization, even a stylization, seldom matched elsewhere—perhaps never paralleled in European practice of the art. The rhythms are more of the surface—linear and ornamental—and less of the basic sculptural ordering of masses than a purist might wish, but there is a charm arresting and unique. The slender forms, the careful formalization of such elements as hair and draperies, and the counterplay of smooth and decorated surfaces are well illustrated in the figure of a warrior in the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery in Kansas City, in the smaller bronzes at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and in a long series of examples in the Etruscan Museum of Florence. All these are bronzes ascribed to approximately 500 B.C. Even more spiritedly decorative are some of the animals: the *Chimera* of Arezzo and the *Lion* of Perugia. The best of the minor animal reliefs and silhouettes suggest a possible Scythian connexion, so simple and powerful is the design, so rich the formal rhythm.

Before the refinement of this formal style, definitely Oriental in its affinities, there was a more primitive type of conventionalized sculpture, especially in terra cotta. It bridged a series of works from small objects to monuments like the rather insensitive warrior figures in the Metropolitan Museum, and some of the compositions on the lids of sarcophagi are filled with sculptural vitality. From the direct and summary treatment of the two-figure group on the Villa Giulio sarcophagus, plastically strong and finely restrained, there is a gradual decline to the over-detailed, woodenly naturalistic portrait figures on the coffins produced in Etruscan-Roman times.

One documentary feature in these sculptures has a bearing on the estimate of the Etruscans as an art-loving people: the wealth of jewellery and dress accessories portrayed. From this and other evidence we can infer a life (for the aristocracy) both refined and luxurious. There have also been discovered



*Villa Giulia Sarcophagus Terra cotta, Etruscan 6th century B.C., Cerveteri  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]*

within the tombs the actual jewellery, metal vessels and figurines. In the entire range of metalcrafts from golden brooch and necklace to bronze engraved cists and even bronze beds the Etruscan was a master-worker. The metal plates of a decorated chariot retain archaic strength mirrors are incised with linear designs suggesting a masterly sense of composition on the flat, furniture parts range from elaborated abstract or architectural members to vigorous animal-body supports. One of the commonest miniature type-statues was designed for use as handles on large bronze vessels.

The Etruscans indulged their taste for Greek decorated pottery to such an extent that for some decades in the nineteenth century the painted vase was considered an Italianate art. Because the tombs of Etruria yielded up vast numbers of them it was taken for granted that they were a native product. There were local types of pottery, most notably the *buchero nero* or black ware, but the finer things are now believed to have come from Athens and Chalcis and Corinth.

Painting as an art is commonly thought to have been highly developed by the Etruscans. And indeed the greatest body of pre-Christian mural painting surviving to our times in Europe is to be found in the tombs at Corneto





Relief on Etruscan stone sarcophagus

[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

Chiusi, Vulci, and Cerveteri. But the exhibit is more interesting for the light it throws on methods, conceptions, and the degree of naturalism attained at times than for its intrinsic merit as art. The compositions are uninvolved and posteresque, and the colours fairly harmonious. But there is little subtlety in the space-filling adjustment, and little sense of formal organization. If the painting is a reflection of Greek work, as is generally supposed, it echoes murals or vase-painting of the less creative eras, and may be, indeed, a derivative of the lost Greek murals of the time. At best there is an occasional bit of almost elegant stylization. In any case the display is of most interest to the archaeologist—it is a marvel that examples of so fragile an art should be preserved intact after twenty-three centuries—and as illustration of the life of the pre-Roman era. The Etruscan nobles are shown as hedonists, in their cups and at their luxurious entertainments. Banqueters, musicians, and dancers are favourite subjects.

The architecture of the Etruscans seems not to have followed the arc of their sculpture. It was structurally rather plain or even rude, but at the same time likely to be overdecorated, with a lavish Oriental hand, when ornamented at all. The arch they handed on to Roman engineers. A second distinctive feature, terra-cotta members and terra-cotta sculptural decorations, even to colossal figures, gradually fell out of use.

It seems incredible that the Etruscan art development, so advanced at the time of the rise of the Romans, should have disappeared to so great an extent in the later Roman fusion. Etruria became a part of the Roman realm. As early as the fourth century B.C., Etruscan artists had been called upon to adorn Roman cities. The *Il soff of Rome* is Etruscan in workmanship. (Later patriotic sculptors added the out-of-scale figures of Romulus and Remus taking suck,

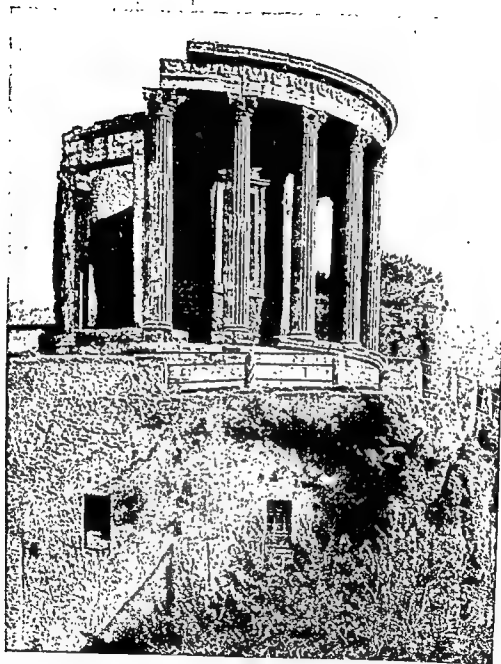
to illustrate a Latin legend ) But the Greek influence, coming from Greek colonial cities to the southward, and from the Greek world of the Eastern Mediterranean, now in line for subjugation to Rome, soon becomes dominant

Unfortunately, maturing Rome thus begins to draw its models and teachers from regions where Greek art is already decadent and distorted The Etruscan culture, adding an Italian element to the heritage of strong archaic art, would seem to have offered a better foundation But at the best, it was Hellenistic art, at the worst post-Alexandrian, that fascinated Roman travellers and plunderers Rome turned away from what virtues Etruscan art had, to become the imitator of the Eastern imitators of true Hellenism Some authorities, however, argue that, since the Greeks taught the Etruscans, the Etruscans in teaching the Romans merely prepared them for a natural return to Greece This obviously allows too little credit for independent values in Etruria the un-Greek vigour and the distinctive refinement

In one basic art, however, a determining impulse and a fundamental principle were developed by the Romans and Etruscans before Greek influence was decisively felt In architecture Etruria gave to Rome the arch and the vault, which were destined to carry Roman engineering into a development directly away from the Greek Thus was laid the foundation of the art in which the Italic peoples were to surpass the Hellenes structural engineering The later official Hellenization of the Western world, particularly under the Emperor Augustus, while it ended in obscuration of much good engineering under second-rate architectural and sculptural decoration, could not hide the glorious feats accomplished by Roman creative engineers

The daring that went into bridges and aqueducts, baths and arenas, is directly related to a building logic and an inventive grasp on materials and methods The first problem of monumental architecture is, in a sense, to bridge space Roofing a great area means carrying heavy materials across spaces impossible to span with the Greeks' simple post-and-lintel system In the arch, and the vault that grew out of it, the Romans had a means of thrusting the massive Colosseum walls story above story, and of covering a luxurious bathing hall that could accommodate three thousand persons

These problems were in the first place practical and scientific matters, and well within the province of a people expert in law, trade, and administration It may be added that, whereas the names of sculptors and painters mentioned by later Latin writers are Greek, the names of architects are largely



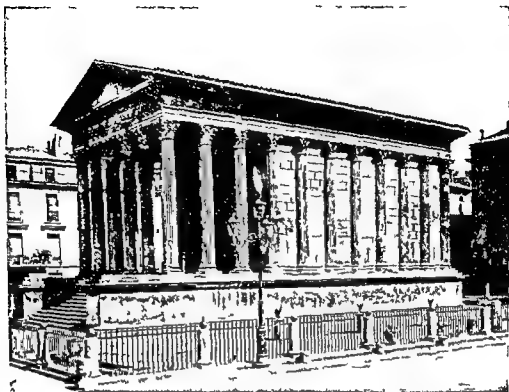
Temple of the Sibyl, Tivoli  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

Roman or Etruscan. These native architects probably solved the engineering or construction problems involved with skill and daring, and then turned over to imported artists the comparatively superficial matters of "decoration." Very little integrated architectural art grew out of such a divided arrangement. But when the hand of time stripped the ornamental casing from the Caracalla Baths or the theatre at Orange, the walls and arches stood out with a mighty lift and a compelling grandeur. And a "plain" engineering work like the Pont du Gard stirs the blood and lifts the eye with its mathematical vigour.

There were temples in Rome, and throughout her far-flung colonies and provinces. But they were less distinctive and inventive, rather they represented the Greek idea adapted and elaborated. The columns usually carried florid Corinthian capitals—the Doric style in particular seemed over-plain to Latin eyes. Decoration was added elsewhere too, so that in the end no bit of bare wall was tolerated. Even the architrave, kept clean by the Greeks to emphasize the feeling of cross-bar strength, was soon being traced over with Roman ornament.

The earlier round structures of the sort, illustrated fragmentarily in the Temple of Vesta at Rome and the Temple of the Sibyl at Tivoli, doubtless had an appealing grace and a pleasing ornamental fullness not known to the architecture of the Hellenes. The more usual adaptation of the Greek rectangular temple is to be seen today in the example at Nîmes in France, known as the *Maison Carrée*. It illustrates both the survival of the essential Greek form, and the typical Roman (originally Etruscan) changes, such as the podium or raised platform with a flight of steps in front, and the substitution of engaged columns or pilasters along the side walls of the cella, in place of the original continuous colonnade. It is not, however, in arched construction. Even today the building has dignity and a quiet effectiveness.

More important in the history of religious architecture and more essentially Roman, is the basilica. Originally secular in purpose, it was destined to become first model for the Christian church, and thus to affect monumental architecture down to the twentieth century. The basilica was commonly situated in the Forum of a Roman city, and was a place of general assembly for trade, banking, and administration of the law. In simplest words, a meeting hall. The plan that became standard was contrived with a central nave between side aisles, and it was here that clerestory lighting and construction came importantly into European building. Some Roman basilicas had semi-



The so-called Maison Carrée Roman temple at Nîmes France

[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

circular halls or bays at the end opposite the entrance corresponding to the later church apse or altar area

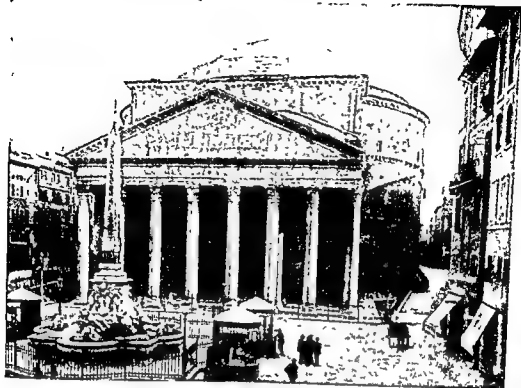
Most existing basilicas are examples built on the general plan of the old combined market, court house, and assembly hall but adapted to the uses of Christian worship. The famous church of St Paul outside the Walls at Rome, though rebuilt in the nineteenth century (on the fourth-century plan), illustrates the impressive simplicity and grandeur of the constructive system, combined with late Roman sumptuous decoration. Where arched construction here surmounts the interior columns, the earlier form had been a continuous architrave, sometimes with gallery above, just under the clerestory windows.

The Pantheon at Rome, technically a temple, was an exceptional type of building, but a superb instance of Roman constructive daring. Today it has



St Paul outside the Walls, Rome  
Rebuilt in the 19th century on the 4th-century plan

lost its interior embellishments, though it is the best preserved of major Roman monuments, but it takes the breath by the vast dimensions, the simplicity of its forms, and the audacity of the structural design. A temple-like forepart or porch lies against an immense circular hall or rotunda, under a low dome. The engineering is elementary: the rotunda walls form the drum from which the dome springs direct, there are no windows. Light is admitted to the building solely through a great circular hole left open to the sky at the top. To sustain the thrust of the dome, the walls are twenty feet thick, and there are eight apse-like niches hollowed in them—one opened to form the main portal, the others designed for statues of gods and later transformed by the Christians into side-chapels. In its time the inside of the dome, richly coffered, and the marble trim of walls and apses, must have been impressively sumptuous; but today it is the grand simplicity of the engineering and the great spaciousness that thrill the visitor. The Pantheon is truly one of the world's most impressive buildings.



The Pantheon. Second century A.D.

The spirit of luxurious grandeur in Roman architecture best expressed itself in palaces, baths, and theatres. The baths in particular became social meeting places of the upper classes, and on them was lavished the most stupendous engineering ingenuity and the most vulgarly ornate architectural decoration. Not only was an incredible number of pools, gymnasia, anointing rooms, and lounging halls to be roofed over, but lecture and studio rooms had to be included in the interior, and a stadium was to adjoin it. It is said that one thousand bath buildings existed in imperial Rome, ranging from the simplest to the immense establishments known by the names of the emperors who built them, Nero, Trajan, Diocletian, etc.

There are sufficient remains of the Baths of Caracalla to impress the observer today with the daring of Roman engineers in roofing the necessary spaces and buttressing the supporting arches. There are traces of the marble

pavements and mosaics, and contemporary descriptions that aid in building up a picture of magnificent decorations and furnishings

The theatres of Rome itself were usually temporary erections, but often were adorned with almost incredibly rich displays of sculpture and architectural accessory, if one may believe eye-witness reports. Some surviving provincial examples indicate, indeed, that the architecture was thought of as part of the spectacle. One Latin description mentions a stage wall with 360 columns, 3000 statues, and other "special" adornments.

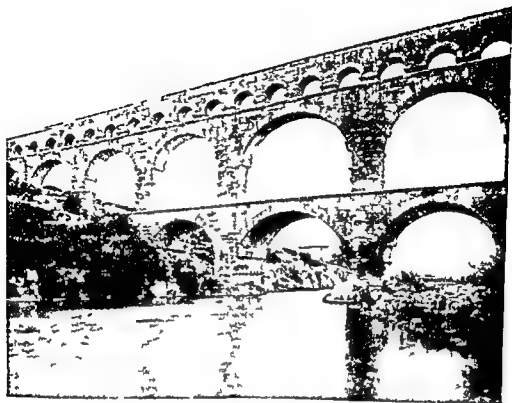
The amphitheatres or arenas have withstood the ravages of time better, and there is enough left of the Colosseum to indicate the type form and to impress the eye—though the complete interior sheathing of coloured marbles has disappeared. The structure, built in the first century A.D. and reconstructed in the third, is of concrete with a facing of Travertine marble. The essential building is a marvellous constructive feat—a bowl more than 600 feet long, with 50 000 or 60,000 seats resting on a honeycomb structure of arcades and vaults, with passageways for spectators, rooms for the gladiators, and cells for the wild beasts. To that extent the architecture is functional and honest. But the marble facing to a certain degree weakens the mass effect, denies the engineering, and contrasts badly with the necessarily heavy materials. The columns carry no weight.

Incidentally it may be noted that the Emperor Augustus, of the Golden Age—who is said to have boasted that he transformed Rome from a city of brick to a city of marble, was speaking in terms of a veneer. Greek monumental buildings had been of solid marble, and the Egyptian pyramids are mountains of laid up stone, but the Romans seem not to have had the time or the thoroughness to deal in difficult materials even when they had the materials at hand.

The commemorative arches or arches of triumph were a sort of architecture invented by the Romans in their passion for the show of power, for the display of patriotic service in "works of national honour." They merit hardly more attention than any other frankly ornamental and advertising monument, though there are thought-out symmetry and academic competence in the compositions. They have served as model to fifty generations of triumphant militarists home from their conquests. They may be cited as perfectly symbolizing the side of the Roman character that is brilliantly spectacular.

But in bridges and aqueducts one finds fully asserted again the spirit that is





The Pont du Gard Roman aqueduct in Southern France

[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

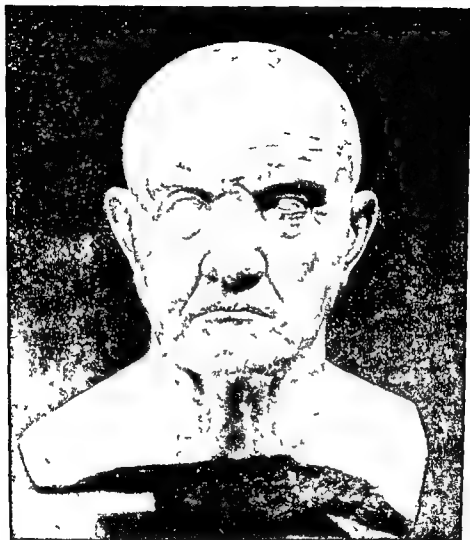
admirable and splendid. These constructions are functional, authentic, mathematical. Waterways strike out across country, daunted by neither hills nor valleys. Gorges are bridged with those honest spans, repeated, unvarying, everlasting. This is the supreme memorial of the Roman as builder. In the thick, heavy, power-breathing Roman wall and in the regimented arches and vaults one has artistic Rome, has her engineer-architects in their most honest and typical achievement. When she turned to ornamentation, employed other architects to split the functional Greek columns and paste them uselessly beside the arches in row over row against the walls, the engineer was eclipsed: a curtain of make-believe was dropped before the true drama of Roman building art. The Pont du Gard has come free of those embellishments, it moves boldly, implacably, nakedly on its business of

carrying an aqueduct over hill and valley. Rousseau does well to speak of it as "this superb construction"—and records that it stirred in him such a sense of elevation that for several hours he forgot his latest mistress.

The Forum might be taken as epitome: old temples, increasingly complex and graceful and adorned but with something of Greek simplicity and harmony persisting, set among palaces, basilicas, memorial columns, and arcades. On every side, magnificent arched construction, grand vistas, and banks of columns crowned by rich Corinthian capitals. On every side a profusion of vulgarized Greek ornament, interspersed with the new sketchy Roman relief picture-panels. Grandeur, exhibitionism, florid display of wealth.

The sculptors of Rome engaged in the mass production of statue-bodies, and when an order for a full-length portrait-figure came in, the only delay was over the making of a head in actual likeness of the client. It was then screwed onto a stock body and the job was complete. A baker in Rome had a tomb sculptured in the form of his favourite baking oven, with even the flues sticking up realistically. A late Roman Emperor had himself copied oversize in bronze, naked, with every wrinkle, rib, and whisker reproduced, on the premiss, possibly, that an imperial Roman blemish would interest populace and posterity more than remote Hellenic idealizations, and he stands thus today in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Sculpture was never so popular, so plentiful, and so true to nature unimproved as in the hey-day of the Roman Empire.

Nineteenth-century Europe and America could understand that sort of art, and Rome then became model and mentor for the Western world. The term "classic," never very exactly defined, came to cover Roman realism, and Roman ornamentalism, as well as Greek lucidity and idealism. French churches, German parliamentary halls, British banks, and American railway terminals took Roman form. Expositions breathed Augustan magnificence. Triumphal arches sprang up in towns and cities here, there, and everywhere, for Washington and for Dewey and for the homecoming of soldiers from this or that conflict. And our best sculptors went to school to Rome, and put Constantinian bas-relief panels on our libraries, stations, and banks alike. They even came, for a while, to rival the Græco-Romans themselves in that sort of hard, utterly realistic portraiture generally associated with the title "A Roman Senator."



Roman portrait Marble  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

It was in lifelike portraiture that the Roman excelled all other artists. His busts are exact, uncompromising, remorselessly literal transcriptions. We do at first mistake them all for Senators, so ruthless, disillusioned, cruelly sensual are the faces commonly duplicated. These "masters of the world" are fighters and materialists, overfed and misshapen. The sculptor misses no slightest record of character written by experience and indulgence upon the counte-



Head of an unknown Roman Terra cotta  
 [Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts Boston]

nances The lines that betray the shrewd tight mind of the financier the brutal strength of the militarist the sour stomach and the disappointed hope of the sensualist all these are placed in pitiless evidence It is an amazing record of character, and more explanatory of Roman history than a hundred written volumes

There are of course revelations less brutal less indicative of corruption

cruelty, and disillusionment. There are even portraits in which a certain nobility of character is implied. The heads of women are at times treated with a tender consideration of feminine grace and gentle character, though uniformly without Greek idealization. The double portrait, usually for grave monuments, tends toward a touching sentimentalism.

From first to last, after Roman art has been Hellenized, the draperies, whether of bust or full-length figure, are wooden and over-conspicuous, and dress accessories are over-detailed. The best Roman sculpture is in the characterful faces, and the prime virtue is faithfulness to life. Perhaps this exactitude of rendering was the sculptor's answer—his way of meeting competition—when the practice grew up of making death masks, by wax impression from the face of the deceased.

A strict chronology would show that Etruscan influence had lasted down through the sculpture of the early Republic. There are transitional statues from which the graceful formalization has not wholly disappeared, and middle examples exhibit a vigour and a simplicity of conception not to be credited to Hellenistic importation. The late Republic leaves very little notable work. It is rather in the beginnings of imperial aggrandizement that the art is reborn, floridly and with popular appeal.

When Augustus set out to give Rome the effect of marble, the Greek artists came in droves. They had no need to create. They merely copied old models, repeated Greek successes, gave the *parvenu* public what it wanted. Cicero, for instance, wanted Muses rather than Bacchantes, as Pliny noted, but they would be copies or versions of the Greek originals in any case. And perhaps this was perfectly right, for Cicero's style of oratory and writing had been formed only after the most assiduous study of Attic models, and, leader that he was in Rome, he would feel culturally at home only in the shadows of Greece.

The second distinctive sculptural achievement of the Romans was in bas-relief panels. They utterly negate the formalism of the Etruscans, rather they carry on the ornamental and episodic tendencies of Alexandrian and Pergamene work. More and more figures are crowded in. Every inch of space must be opulently filled. Gradually allegorical and traditional subject-matter give way before representation of contemporary event and episode. Repose is forgotten, movement becomes the new objective. Action scenes afford most scope to the artist—and what so full of action as battles and triumphal processions?

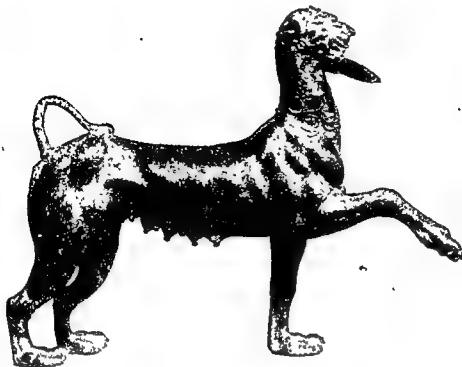
The ideals of stone sculpture are wholly forgotten. Modelling suitable to the clay sketch is transferred into the unsuitable stone. Landscapes and buildings in perspective are attempted in the backgrounds.

It is questionable whether this sort of sculptural illustration is ever appropriate to architectural composition. It does have a decorative or showy effectiveness, but the formal values are lost, the architectonic unity is negated. The Hindus will succeed in fitting equally elaborate figure-organizations into superb bas-relief murals, but they will subordinate individual figures to the ensemble, they will neglect the story element, and strive for the flat even rhythm and subdued counterpoint.

There is no questioning the values of the better Roman panels, whether on triumphal arch or altar or sarcophagus, *as illustration*. They tell the action-story or the anecdote clearly and with animation. They remind one of the stirring event, and they instruct the patriot and warn the sceptic. If the intellectual or narrative intention, the physical animation, and the sketchy treatment are all inimical to architectural repose and unity, the answer is that the Roman was not interested in architecture as such. The subject-matter of the panel was the important thing. Above that, the showy effect of multiplied figures and broken surface was rich, impressive. The episode is garlanded amid vines and wreaths and lacery. Among the figures are the symbols of power—*fascies* and trophies and swords. But the story comes first, the literary message, then the eye filling profusion—not to say confusion—of chiselled captives and soldiers and revellers.

The triumphal arches appropriately bore bas-relief stories of military and political achievement. The heavy building had no use other than to frame a series of sculptural illustrations and commemorative inscriptions and to advertise, by its own magnificence, the name of an historic character. The Arch of Titus is one of the best known of the simpler arches and two high-relief panels inside the archway are highly esteemed as spirited military sculpture. Of the showier examples the Arch of Constantine, near the Colosseum, is first, and scarcely an inch of its surface has escaped the sculptors' hands. Some of the panels are transferred from arches erected in honour of earlier emperors, and the whole therefore affords a sort of progressive review of late Roman relief-picturing.

To this day there rises out of the ruins of Trajan's Forum a shaft one hundred and ten feet high, traced over with a continuous spiral bas-relief narrative of the Emperor Trajan's exploits. It is an astonishing *tour de force*, hardly



*Pantheress. Roman statuette with strong Etruscan feeling Bronze  
Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, D.C.*

equalled even in opulent Asiatic sculpture. Its interest is, of course, chiefly historical, as a record of military campaigns against the barbarians of the North. But it is a major sculptural curiosity too: a series of book illustrations laboriously translated into stone and spread on a continuous ribbon—most of it up where it cannot, and never could, be seen.

At an earlier date, when the narrative current ran less strong and the crowding of figures was less insisted upon, there had been monuments with a better relationship of sculpture and architecture. A high point in flowing pictorial bas-relief was touched in certain panels of the *Ara Pacis*, the peace shrine erected by Augustus in A.D. 13. The virtues are largely those of wash drawing; but for observers who are undisturbed by the transposition of the values of one art into another, these have proved harmoniously pleasing. They were endlessly imitated by the best Western sculptors until the present wave of

modernism opened the way back to "the feel for the stone," with consequent depreciation of fluent paint values

In ornament as such—seen chiefly in sculpture, but as a component of decorative painting, too—the Romans brought in fresh motives and methods. They failed to invent architectural accessories so right, for example, as the Greek egg-and-dart moulding, or so rich as the Persian arabesques and Moslem panelling. But within the limits of thin naturalistic patterning they introduced unhackneyed materials and composed them pleasingly. The grapevine circles gracefully, and is faultlessly natural. Even the rose and the fig are transferred delicately to marble panel or made to entwine mock columns. Gradually the flat backgrounds against which the design once stood out are themselves filled with tracery until high- and low-relief merge in one play of light and shade. But the observer never loses the identity of grape or acanthus or rose in formalized approximations: the natural shapes and directions and textures are faithfully copied. This is the Roman's achievement and his weakness. Some believe that in observing nature afresh and escaping traditional stereotypes, he brought art to a new release of invention and composition, but vision and formal creation are relatively absent.

Among the minor genre pieces and the trivia of the Roman household and market place are many statuettes and novelties appealing as sentimental mementoes or caricatures or photographic records. Particularly the occasional grotesques, whether of dwarfs or comic actors or peasants, are amusing and revealing. The countless Cupids are too sweet for anything: dancing, playing on lyres, holding up useful lamps or useless pillars, or adorning mirror or jug. Roman coins are not very important as compared with those of the cities incorporated into the Empire, of Syracuse and Tarentum, of the Ionian cities, of Athens and Corinth. Cameo-cutting is considered a typical Roman art. Occasionally the contrast of light and dark striations is delicately manipulated for a striking and rich effect. More often the result is posterousque, even garish. This duotone contrast was carried into glass-making with results to be studied in the Portland Vase, which is as famous as it is artistically unimportant.

Roman silverware, greatly prized today by collectors and museums, and praised for the masterly treatment of figures in high relief—is, in the pieces generally exhibited, unfunctional and over-elaborate. Plates have their bottoms pushed up in figure-compositions as high as the brim. Silver cups lose





*Earth, Air, and Water* Relief in stone from the Ara Pacis, Rome First century A.D.  
Uffizi Gallery, Florence [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

their roundness in a confusion of applied figure-sculpturing and entwining parasitic ornamentation. Cup-quality is lost in the over-zealousness of the picturer and the opulent decorator. It is the same fault that blemished the main story of Roman plastic art: the obscuring of basic design and the simple virtues of plastic organization under showy surface manipulation. It could be illustrated again in the pottery of the Italianate peoples. Simple forms degenerate into elaborate ones. The fine proportions are lost. What vase-painting there is lacks relationship to the vessel's architecture. Finally the sides and base and brim must be given over to the sculptor: not only low- but high-relief destroys the integrity of the vase. From tiny clay pots to colossal marble urns there is an instructive exhibit of the functional designer (who is merely another sort of engineer) thwarted by the enthusiastic decorator.

The volcano Vesuvius once acted to preserve a cross-section of Roman art as it existed in the homes of representative patrician citizens. At Pompeii one may see the house walls decorated with paintings in the several styles in vogue in A.D. 79. In what would today be called "interior decoration" there was a widespread taste for walls completely painted over with architectural designs, sometimes contrived with illusionistic intention, to make the room

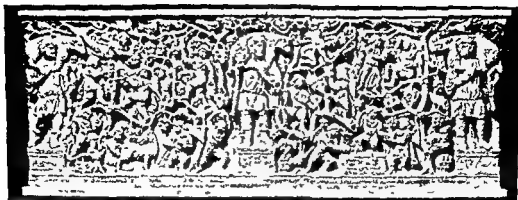
seem more spacious or to afford a false vista, sometimes partly or wholly conventionalized, for the decorative effect of a profuse delineation of porticoes panels, platforms, and vistas, replete with fanciful columns, friezes, and garlands. Into the *melange* would be admitted occasional pictorial panels, each painted in the manner of an easel picture. It is usually these panels, removed for museum preservation, that are exhibited to us as Roman painting-art.

Pliny's account of painting and painters is concerned largely with records and legends of Greek artists, rather than Roman. He prefaces his section on bronze statuary with a sweeping complaint about the decadence of the arts in his own time, the first century A.D. He writes "It is extraordinary that when the price given for works of art has risen so enormously, art itself should have lost its claim to our respect. The truth is that the aim of the artist, as of everyone else in our times, is to gain money, not fame as in the old days, when the noblest of their nation thought art one of the paths to glory, and ascribed it even to the gods."

Pliny describes a Rome in which temples, baths, and other public buildings are extensively adorned with pictures, including some of the most famous works of Apelles, Polygnotus, Zeuxis and others of the Greek realists, and there is frequent mention of the private galleries and collections of the emperors and aristocrats. But the painters with Roman names claim comparatively little space. Pliny writes of them with some reserve.

Nor must I neglect *Studius* a painter of the days of Augustus, who introduced a delightful style of decorating walls with representations of villas, harbours, landscape, gardens, sacred groves, woods, hills, fishponds, straits, streams and shores any scene in short that took the fancy. In these he introduced figures of people on foot, or in boats. Not long before the time of the god Augustus *Arellius* had earned distinction at Rome, save for the sacrilege by which he notoriously degraded his art. Always desirous of flattering some woman or other with whom he chanced to be in love, he painted goddesses in the person of his mistresses, of whom his paintings are a mere catalogue. The painter *Famulus* also lived not long ago; he was grave and severe in his person, while his painting was rich and vivid. He painted an *Athena* whose eyes are turned to the spectator from whatever side he may be looking.

As might be expected even in the case of a more creative people, most of the preserved pictures being incidental to the routine ornamentation of the houses of the rich, are dull hack work, interesting chiefly for their age, the almost miraculous manner of their survival, and the light they cast upon Roman customs and beliefs. Many are revealing in regard to those excesses,



*The Good Shepherd. Relief on a Roman sarcophagus. Lateran Museum  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]*

cultish and erotic, which were a part of the life of a disillusioned and indulgent class. As formal art only a hundredth of the painting may be said to have even a trace of character or of lasting value.

What is the explanation of this national betrayal, this negation of art, in field after field—painting, sculpture, metalwork, pottery? What useful lesson can the student of world art take away from this display, in which the highest achievements (except the superb engineering) are in the hard realism of the sculpture and a general florid decorativeness?

The Roman philosophy of life was, speaking very generally, pragmatic and realistic. Cruel and ruthless on the one side, it was conducive to self-indulgence on the other. Rome knew little of the triumphs of the spirit. The Romans thought art could be produced by subjugation, borrowing, and compulsion. Roman life never came to a balance: it was propelled by force, motivated by personal ambition. Art is an expression of fine living. The Romans seem never to have come to that sort of living which overflows into inspired expression. In the most practical phase, or foundation, of the most practical art, in engineering, they excelled, and left monuments that still command respect and evoke admiration. The rest bespeaks luxury and display rather than character, conviction, and formal sensibility.

Toward the end, the bands of Christian worshippers were taking first indecisive steps in the direction of a very different art. Discountenanced by the true Romans, persecuted, without position, they yet possessed one quality which their persecutors had lacked—and needed before art could be char-

found, have come from Asia, so Europe's visual art has been richest and most warming and satisfying when the rather bare classicism and intellectualism of the West have been quickened by the mysticism, the colour (in the widest sense), and the refined aesthetic sensibility borne in by invaders from the Middle and Far East. There can be no doubt that today the West is disillusioned over the sterile art of its post-Renaissance period, and is at last aware that the Greek achievement, for all its perfection of forms, was limited to a very narrow segment of the field open to the artist, that the larger body of profound and masterly art is of China and Persia, and in only a slightly lesser degree, of India and Japan.

The Hindu philosopher, in an effort to express the inexpressible, offers a figure which is helpful to the Western observer dismayed by the surface strangeness of Oriental art. The soul, he says, is an interior eye. It looks not out upon the external world, but toward eternal realities. It sees the universe in essence, in spiritual significance. The Oriental addresses his art to this inner eye instead of trying to please the outer eye by familiarity or clever imitation or the intellect by reasoned expression. The abstract elements in art—colour, rhythm, formal vitality—are a language intelligible to the soul, and welcome to the inner vision.

This eye in the centre of consciousness, atrophied in most Western men through neglect, or deliberately blinded in favour of the reasoning intellect, can be opened, grows sensitive with use. It alone detects the most joyous and profound pleasures possible to art. It is concerned with those values associated with feeling rather than with statement, asks no translation through senses and brain, transports the beholder at once to the source at which the artist found his inspiration and conceived his image.

When the modern theorist speaks of formal excellence, plastic orchestration, and universal rhythms he is trying to define qualities in art unexplainable in words and not to be reasoned into acceptance, but he is treating of values real and appealing to the inner eye—and far more sought after and achieved in Eastern than in Western art.

The Western eye, one might truly say, has been fact-seeking, nervous, eager for objective report, contemptuous of the unfamiliar. It has been form-blind and imagination-shy. But now, for the first time since the Renaissance, great numbers of Occidental people are trying to understand the implications of the symbol of the inner eye. They recognize that without stilling the mind and developing an inner contemplative vision they cannot hope to



Ma Yüan: *Landscape with Bridge and Willows*. Sung Dynasty  
[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

apprehend the message and to relish the formal beauty of a Sung landscape or a T'ang bronze.

Chinese painting is strange because it is an expression of the soul's quietude, of spiritual contemplation. Its language is more of abstract and universal movement and mood than of observed effect and concrete natural detail. It speaks best to those who meet its quiet with quiet, who come to it innocent of realistic expectation. A spirited monster carved by a Han sculptor is more a product of the feeling evoked by the monster idea, and by masses of stone, than a representation.

acterful and distinctive—*faith*. It will be many centuries before that faith is reflected in a great body of art. There will be diverse developments of Oriental Christian art known as Byzantine before Italy and the peoples of the old Roman colonies to the north French and German make their contribution. Rome itself will create no significant works for a millennium after Constantine. Yet in the sixteenth century this will be the city of Michelangelo one of the supreme creative figures of all time.



Warriors Dance Roman relief panel Vatican Museum  
[Anderson photo courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

## Far Eastern Art and the Inner Eye

THE Greeks had a saying which, fully understood, affords a key to the secret of Oriental philosophy and Oriental art "The tree of Knowledge is not the tree of Life" The Hellenes themselves discounted the saying, built their culture on knowledge, on the intellectually knowable But the Eastern nations from Persia to China were at the same time developing civilizations distinguished by arts suffused with the qualities of the spirit mystic, colourful, formal To them the knowable was but the prose of external living They considered the life of the West pedantically material superficial, and unilluminated They recognized the tree of Knowledge as a lesser guide to living and to art practice

The Greek way and the Oriental way—therein is a contrast instructive and decisive The way of the mind and the way of the spirit The Greek way was to spurn the unknowable, to distrust what could not be identified by the brain, to advance by intellectualization, to fix in art works the naturally beautiful, the rational the deduced ideal Greek art rises out of sensitive observation, and it results in clear, realistic representations—or, in architecture, in logical, functional structure, sparsely ornamented

The Oriental way is to discount the observed natural phenomenon, to seek the essence of life in intuitively apprehended values, in spiritual intimations, and in the abstract elements of colour and creative formal organization Oriental art, less obviously humanistic, natural, and intellectual, feeds the spirit Its glories are achieved in the realms of the near-abstract, the contemplatively mystical, and the richly sensuous

Possibly the best in Western art has arisen when waves of influence have surged in from the East Just as Europe's religions, whenever they are pro-

The observer who sincerely desires to experience the Oriental work of art—no less than the artist who wishes to break through the restraints put by intellect upon creation—does well to ponder over the symbol of the eye at the centre of being. Pondering and understanding, he may find new quietude in living, new insight, even ecstasy in contemplation, and a new world of formal enjoyment opened before him in the realm of Oriental art. At the best he may experience the glow of the soul, the suffusing illumination of the inner being which comes with surrender to the spirit and its participation in the rhythmic creative ordering of existence.

As a last word about the spirit and intent of Asiatic art one may say that it does not hold up a landscape as an exhibit. It aims rather to enable the beholder to feel his oneness with the creative order, the harmonious oneness at the source of all life. Similarly Asiatic religious painting and sculpture exist, not like Western, to instruct and impress and glorify, but to afford a religious feeling of utter peace, of rightness, of suffusing joy. It is at once direct gratifying visual experience, the means to a cosmic self-identification, and a conveyor of the feeling of order as the foundation of the spiritual-material world.

Whatever one's personal response, it is no longer possible to refuse to place the body of Asiatic art above that of any other continent. In the great number of masterpieces of painting and sculpture bequeathed to later ages in the splendour and sensitivity of the art-life of cultured people in era after era, and most of all in the plastic and sensuous richness of the so-called minor arts, in pottery and porcelain, in textile and costuming, and in metalwork and jade and lacquer, the East is superior.

It generally comes as a surprise to the Westerner, in his assumption of superiority—well founded in the fields of science, invention, and warfare—that Orientals look down upon the arts of the West. They have examined realism, and have found it an inferior type of expression. They miss the accent of cosmic calm, the abstract signs of spiritual penetration, the serenity that comes after contemplation.

In the world stream of art no current, except possibly the Egyptian, ever flowed through so many millenniums with a single distinctive accent as has the Chinese. The Persian has flowered at intervals through a period as long, but with interruptions. Beside these two the Japanese culture seems comparatively new and immature, yet it has an unbroken history of fourteen hundred years, and its arts were flourishing four centuries before the English language was born.



It is time that we of the New World, of Europe and America, recognized this elder Asiatic culture, that we accepted it as in the main stream of the world's significant art. In relating our Western accomplishment to it we shall need to acknowledge not only the surpassing beauty of its manifestations but the enriching influence it has had upon our own visual arts, not only at Byzantium and Ravenna, but in Moorish Spain, in Venice, in nineteenth-century Europe, perhaps, too, in some untraced circuit from Asia across the Bering bridge, or down through Polynesia, across the Pacific Ocean to Peru and Mexico, and so by a back road into the Europe-derived American culture.

The Stone Age of prehistory yields up in China the usual potteries, stone weapons, and bone implements of beginning craftsmanship. The clay vessels are somewhat more intricately and sensitively ornamented than in many other Neolithic cultures. One important bit of information prised out of the finds and conclusions of archaeologists is that the Chinese of historic times are descended from Stone-Age ancestors resident on the same soil. This had been challenged for long it was believed by Occidental scholars that the Chinese culture had been imported, at an advanced stage, from some region to the westward. Now, from the evidence of graves not later than 3000 B.C. and of remains from the Bronze Age, a continuity is proven. This does not preclude the probability, even the certainty, that influences from the outside were felt again and again.

The historical sequence of certain notable local characteristics is first established in some bronze vessels now dated vaguely "after the fourteenth century B.C.", but the magnificent decoration and expert craftsmanship indicate a long antecedent period of experiment and maturation. The ceremonial character of the cauldrons, wine-vessels, and bells, often engraved with commemorative inscriptions, leaves no doubt that here the Bronze Age was already a time of sumptuous court custom and refined luxury. Probably the feudal aristocrats or war lords enjoyed their culture amidst conditions of exceptionally savage exploitation and mass murder and against a background of crude superstition, but the relics of art and ritual are nonetheless gorgeous and everlastingly eloquent of an advanced if barbaric civilization.

While Chinese history is chronicled from about 1000 B.C., it is only for the third century B.C. that scholars describe the forms of life in detail. The priest-kings and feudal lords then gave way to the First Universal Emperor—he

officially took that name—who united the country into one empire, built the Great Wall, and carried on the established magnificence of custom and art. His dynasty gave place to that with which the first great flowering of the sculptural art is associated, the Han, which lasted from 206 B.C. to A.D. 220. It is one of the outstanding periods of truly creative sculpture in all world history. In the same period the aim and methods of painting became fixed, though the works are almost wholly lost. Pottery also was carried to new refinements.

Since art in China is so closely attuned to the spiritual life, it is well to remind ourselves that in the sixth century B.C., there had lived in this country two of the greatest religious prophets of all time, Lao-tze and Confucius. It was the century of the coming of Buddha to India, and the one preceding the rise of profane philosophy and intellectual inquiry in Greece (these largely taking the place of religion in the classic world thereafter). The connexion between Chinese painting and the Taoist philosophy, serene, spirit-centred, is not to be missed. Buddhism, when effectively introduced into China, in the troubled centuries of the Han dynasty, brought its own methods and its own emblems, and these were absorbed, not without a lingering influence of Indian-Buddhist art, in the Chinese practice of sculpture and painting during the Wei dynasty, toward the end of the four-hundred-year period lying between the Han and the T'ang flowerings.

It is with the T'ang dynasty that Asiatic art records its greatest triumphs. In its three-century reign (from A.D. 618) the arts are extended into annexed lands—and determine the direction of development in independent Japan, too. Chinese Buddhism fixes its course, somewhat away from the asceticism of India. A more humanistic note suggests the surviving influence of Lao-tze, foreshadowing the later Taoism in which the two religions find harmonious accord. In painting and in sculpture, in porcelain and in small clay figure, in textile and jade, this is one of the most prolific and exciting periods in world history. The life of the nobles was luxurious and gay, and poets, painters, and scholars were invited to the court and encouraged to carry on their work under generous imperial patronage.

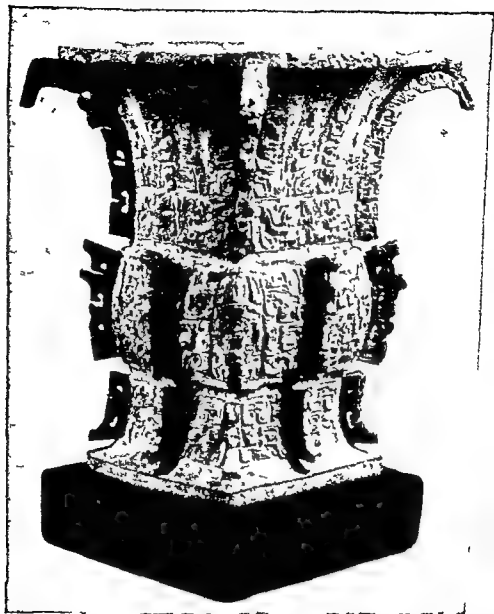
Most authorities count the achievement of the Sung dynasty (960-1276) the more masterly in the field of painting, although agreeing that sculpture then declines. This period is represented today by many more actual works, including the first great surviving body of landscape painting—often directly associated with the Taoist emphasis upon inner and abstract values.



Bronze ceremonial vessels, illustrating richness of ornamentation and refinement of proportioning  
[Courtesy C. T. Loo & Company]

There will be one further notable, not to say surpassingly lovely, phase of Chinese art, in the Ming period. But that corresponds to the Renaissance era in the Western world, from the fourteenth century, and belongs to a later group of chapters. Here it is the art works of the Han, T'ang, and Sung dynasties that demand attention, for they are related in time to the ancient and medieval art of the Western peoples. To compress so much in so little is like grouping Egyptian sculpture and the best of European painting—say the Sienese, the Florentine, the Venetian, Rembrandt, and El Greco—within one chapter.

That the artist-craftsman was an important personage in cultured Chinese society from as early as the end of the second millennium B.C. is to be inferred from the ceremonial bronzes produced then and through the following fifteen centuries. It is so usual to designate only free-standing sculpture and



Bronze ritual vessel *Collection of the Chinese Government*  
[Photo, courtesy Ton-Yü g and Company]

painting by the term "fine arts" that the decorated vessels are sometimes overlooked as examples of masterly design. But there is a magnificent, even monumental quality about the great bronze vases, sacrificial urns, and cauldrons of the pre-Han period.

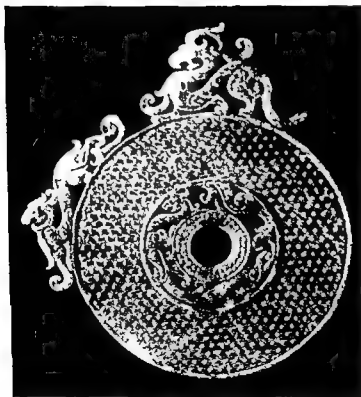
In them the Chinese combined a creative handling of larger form with extraordinary richness of decoration. The co-ordination of functional expressiveness and ornamentation is as nearly perfect as in the output of utilitarian or ceremonial metalwork objects of any civilization. The celebrated golden cups of Mycenaean and the high-relief silverware of Rome seem in this company to lack integrity and restraint. Indeed, the most ornate and least organic of Chinese mirrors and vases came after the effects of a wave of influence from Greece or Asia Minor alien to the Eastern genius.

The point to be observed is that, despite the wealth of ornament, even its profusion, the average vessel is strongly outlined, the structural and use values are accentuated rather than obscured, and the appearance of added adornment is avoided. The shapes are as pure and refined as those of Greek vases, and represent a wider range.

The motives of the decoration differ with the succeeding periods and changes in national life, and the types of ornamentation vary from the most delicate and intricate all-over pattern to the most pronounced high-relief conventionalizations of animal forms or geometrical figures. The earlier recognizable motives are like formalizations, almost abstract, of fanciful animals, such as dragons and ogres, and the source is probably to be sought in ancient animistic religions.

The massiveness so characteristic of early times persists in the Han bronzes. But the decoration is then curbed. There is sometimes rich surface patterning, but it is lighter, often engraved—where the earlier custom of casting the entire vessel, with its ornament, in one piece, had resulted in deeper-cut and more strongly dynamic relief. That the Han artists should have refined ornament without impairing the larger vitality and the plastic life of the object, retaining the purity and strength of the outlines, is testimony to exceptional creative sensibility. The simple, admirably functional vessels of that era would be judged elsewhere to be from the early, most virile period of an art development, rather than representative of a phase that came after fifteen hundred years of expert production in the field.

In the later manifestations—for bronze manufacture continued, although partially replaced by porcelain, through the T'ang and Sun dynasties—the



Jade ornaments *Stags*, above [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art], Plaque with dragons below [Courtesy William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City]

heaven and earth, for fertility, and for peace, and two natural forms side by side may have stood for wedded bliss. All this is bound up with the intricate network of ritual, sacrifice, and funeral custom that underlay religious observance before the introduction of Buddhism. But today all that counts is that the carved jades are compellingly endowed with the nobility and formal life of visually affective art—in short, they are beautiful.

Pottery is a third instance of surpassing mastery in those early times before sculpture and painting had emerged in what is now considered "characteristic Chinese form." Almost immemorially the clay vessels had taken on exceptional refinement. Superiority in this craft will continue through later ages until "china" becomes the name for the world's most finished pottery no matter where made. The Persians and the Chinese are recognized as masters in this field beyond all other peoples.

Oversize stone monsters, monumentally impressive, incomparably spirited, gorgeously decorative, tiny bronze or gold plaques, fibulas and charms, virilely rhythmic in silhouette and massing, strongly formalized, uniquely graceful figures in clay and porcelain, polo-players and camels and court ladies, with indescribable sculptural fullness and suavity—these are images that leap to mind at mention of Chinese sculpture: three utterly different branches of the art of carving, each mastered within a single culture. Even then one has not mentioned the Buddhist cave statues that are second only to the Hindu figures, and a very special sort of low-relief mural art, and the medieval full-round figures of Bodhisattvas that constitute one of the noblest and serenest types of religious sculpture in history. No other land exhibits so great a range of excellence in a single art, from miniature to monumental, from simplest austere statement to gorgeously elaborated decoration, from calm to exuberance and spirited elegance.

But to begin the description of these exciting monuments and figures and jewel-like emblems with a semblance of order, let us go back to the shadowy era before the Han accession in 206 B.C. There then existed, says legend, or history, colossal bronze statues, but they seem mostly to have been melted up for money under later regimes. There is, indeed, surprisingly little sculpture in the round, considering the mastery long since attained in the design and casting of the bronze dishes, vases, and bells, and in miniature jade charms and bronze reliefs. The art exists rather in figures accessory to the utilitarian bronzes. Not uncommonly, vigorous little animals stand up like sentinels at

*Lion Stone*

corners of the ceremonial vessel, or lie snugly against the lid, while others, more formalized constitute handles or spouts or simply lend compositional accents. Often they all but disappear in near-by geometric abstractions.

In the Han dynasty, however, we see them come down, so to speak, into the open. Soon there are bronze animals, stone animals, and clay animals





*Bear Gilt bronze statuette, Han Dynasty*  
*[Courtesy City Art Museum, St. Louis]*

The little bronze bears are especially well known, with their tendency toward realism, but very simple and broadly proportioned for formal effect. A wide range of favourite pets appears in clay, in miniature, as figures for deposit in tombs, so that the deceased may have beside him the companions he valued in life. In this connexion there are also figurines of fine ladies, indicating a gratifying change in etiquette. A wife had formerly been buried alive with her dead husband, but now a clay effigy was entombed as substitute. Along with the wives and servants are the charming little pigs, hens, and ducks. Almost none of these human figure or animal is to be compared with the truly surpassing statuettes of the T'ang era a few centuries later, but there are many arresting and rewarding examples, and a rare demure girl or a spirited



*Lion Monumental stone sculpture*  
 [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

horse from one of those ancient burying places still stirs our deepest admiration

The monumental statue of a horse beside the tomb of General Ho Ch'u Ping who had travelled as far west as the Persian border, is dated by archaeologists at about 117 B C., and is one of the oldest surviving examples of a type of commemorative art that flourished in China through many centuries. But it is better to skip over this and the other large sculpture of the Han period and most of the following Six Dynasties period to the truly grand stone animals of the fifth and sixth centuries A D. These may be divided into two sorts: lions more or less plain, and lions with additions that make them into unearthly monsters—chimeras and such. In practically all the sculptural conception and the treatment are so direct, simple, and creative that the



*Mythical Horse* Bronze statuette probably of T'ang or Sung Dynasty  
 [Courtesy Cleveland Museum of Art]

figures are lifted to a plane of formal nobility. They are filled with the spirit of the animal *and* the spirit of creative sculpture. In their massing, proportioning, and rhythmic organization they are impressive, virile, even dramatic. Here, in the large, is the same sculptural vitality or energy of movement, combined with suave rhythmic conventionalization, which is found at a supreme level in the small animal bronzes. There is in both fields the linear



*Chimera* Bronze statuette, 1st-4th century A D  
 [Courtesy William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City]

enrichment of surface, the stylization by means of silhouettes echoed in incised lines, of minor rounded forms repeated in juxtaposition. There are few sculptural exhibits in all history so stirring, few monumental sculptures so essentially right.

It is a misfortune for the West that none but far-travellers can see the finest of these monsters. The more monumental ones still lie where their creators placed them, often covered completely or partially by the dirt of the ages. Today examples rise up half uncovered in farmyard or field, reminders of the glories of Chinese life fourteen centuries ago. Or should it be phrased instead, "the glories of Chinese death"? For these were funerary figures, markers pointing the way to the tomb of a celebrated man, or perhaps indicating the way of the spirit *from* the tomb. There is no record elsewhere on an equally colossal scale of man's age-long preoccupation with life beyond

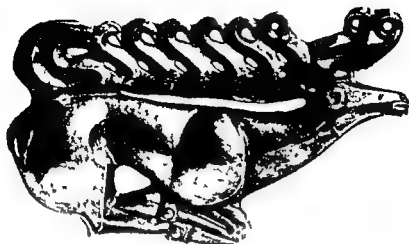
death except in Egypt. The funerary and commemorative arts of these two ancient civilizations offer a fruitful field of comparative art study.

The art of the Han era had reacted from a certain fullness and ornamentalism of the preceding periods and was direct and vigorous. Despite the linear tracing, not to say patterning, added on the surface of the mountainous masses of the lions and chimeras, no less than on the small bronzes, the general feeling of simplification and of unified rhythm had persisted into post-Han sculpture. In seeking the source of this lasting influence in works both large and small, and predominantly in animal figures, one is carried back to one of the most fascinating theories in the history of art.

This theory has it that centuries earlier, in faraway Northern or Western Asia, there had originated a distinctive and instantly recognizable type of sculpture in metals, known until recently as "the Scythian animal art", and that in the course of time, through repeated migrations of the barbarians of the Eurasian steppes, southward and eastward at first, then westward, the style had been carried to Persia, to the upper valleys of China, where it took hold as a main root of pre-Buddhist sculpture, and in the West, to scattered areas of "barbarian culture" from Finland and the land of the Vikings to Visigothic Spain and Lombardy. It is essentially the art of the nomad tribes of the North—pouring out of that Asiatic reservoir which had held from time immemorial shifting and mixing tribes, Aryan and Mongolian, known to later history in a shadowy way as Scythians, Sarmatians, and Huns.

The evidence seen in survivals of the art itself is strongly in favour of a common origin for the Luristan animal figures of Persia, the early animal sculpture of China, and the Scythian originals found in lower Russia. The rare Northern European examples are so akin in both motives and sculptural feeling or method that an assumed relationship is at least defensible, and there is even reason to wonder whether the Etruscan formalization (so soon snuffed out after the classicized Romans laid hands on it) may not have arisen out of contact of the immigrants to Etruria with the Scythians, or with their neighbours along the Anatolian coast, perhaps through the Hitites. Lately the tendency among archaeologists has been to drop the name "Scythian art," to speak of the Eurasian animal art or the art of the steppes. Some authorities, attempting to reconcile art terminology to one or another racial classification, speak of this development as Indo-Germanic art, or as the Iranian-European style. At least one broadens the idea and tags it "Amerasiatic."

The single certainty is that one of the great manifestations of the sculptural



*Reindeer* Gold plaque from a shield, Scythian 7th century B.C. *The Hermitage, Leningrad* [Photo, courtesy American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology]

art exists in a widely scattered yet recognizably related display of animals in metal, found in the tombs of Scythian chiefs in Southern Russia and Siberia, in the graves of warriors in Luristan in Western Persia, and in the graves on the borders of Western China. The many examples discovered in these three chief caches are matched by odd pieces discovered along the European trail of Bronze Age culture.

The Scythian style, if we may still term it that, died out in its own land—unless perchance it had something to do with the vigour of Russo-Byzantine art. In Persia it flowered once, in a restricted district, was lost to sight, but affected manifestations in the other visual arts. In China alone it was absorbed or rather it triumphed, and found continuous life over a period of many centuries, its spirit spread from the miniature bronze bears and boars and deer to the monumental stone chimeras.

The hallmarks of the style are three: strict decorative formalization, extraordinary plastic vitality, and strong simplification of main motives along with rich counterplay of minor forms. The strength, the unity within richness, may be said to constitute a cardinal virtue of all art in which formal excellence and sensuous adornment are expertly combined, but the effect

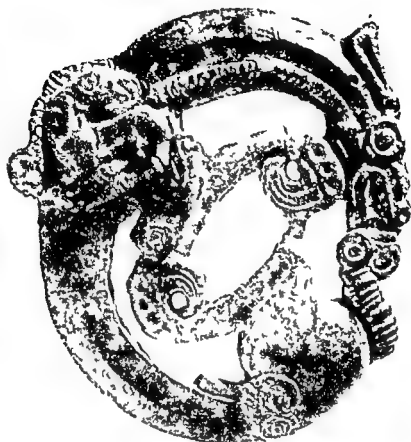
of concentrated energy, of spirited movement, within a profusely decorative composition is here surpassingly mastered in many of the brooches, talismans and plaques. Whether it is a gold buckle from Scythia itself, or a Luristan harness-ring or an ornamental stag in bronze from the Ordos Desert, there is the vital movement, the dominating, compelling single animal-rhythm cushioned in decorative outline, patterned accessory, and echoing frame.

There is an impression of largeness even in small pieces. Practically always there is distortion of the object as it would be seen by the camera: there is no breath here of the realism of Sumeria and of Crete, or Greece and of Rome. It is decoration, not depiction, that the artist has intended, conventionalization for sculptural vigour, forthright ornamentalism—something added frankly for the sake of richness—and always the extraordinary boldness and virility. There is almost always, too, an avoidance of symmetry, an avoidance inevitable in any art so dynamic and so individualized.

Most of the miniature examples of the style (by far the larger portion of the whole range) are in low-relief. Even when technically "in the round," the figure is flattened and given glyptic form. Animals single or in groups, free figures geometrized until their outlines form their own frames in almost mathematical regularity, ornamental plaques pierced through to give additional sharpness to the silhouette, vigorously carved dagger-handles—these are typical. There is too that other non-realistic touch: the increase of formal elegance by surface patterning, sometimes by traced lines, oftener, as befits sculpture, by repetitions of minor swelling forms, as in the horns of a stag or mountain goat, or the mane of a horse or lion. This particular sort of sculptural counterpoint is nowhere else manipulated with such telling effect.

Just when the "animal style" art entered China is still uncertain. It may have come as a gradual infusion, as wave after wave of invaders from the vague "West" bore it. There is a possibility that the pre-Han bronze vessels had gained their animal masks and claws and occasional full animal figures from contact if not invasion from that quarter. Certainly a wide range of decorative motives on earlier examples indicates as much. When independent sculpture comes in, the subject matter is such that one can only assume the foreign, Western origin; the animals are so often those important to a hunting people, not to an agricultural people like the Chinese.

The actual examples closest to the Scythian and Luristan prototypes are found on the Western borders of Old China—mainly in the Ordos Desert, whence their common designation as the Ordos bronzes. From the same



Animal-art harness ornament Bronze Crimea 6th or 5th century B.C. The Hermitage, Leningrad [Photo, courtesy American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology]

direction came the dynamic hosts and leaders who again and again conquered the static but lasting Chinese nation

Until archaeologists and anthropologists piece together more of the puzzle of cultural interpenetration and tribal shifts it is bootless to do more than accept the fact of a common Eurasian heritage, and to note that in China the animal-art vitality, slowly modified in its miniature forms, passed over into larger sculpture—the result being those uniquely decorative monumental lions which served as the point of departure for this digression. But the world is likely to hear more rather than less of a mother art of the Asian steppes





Examples of Scythian and Chinese animal art  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]



*Water Buffalo, Covered vessel bronze pre-Han period*  
 [Courtesy Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University]

The entire Scythian or Eurasian animal art may be a by-product of religion, the visual evidence of a cult of the animal. There is no proof for this, however, and another interpretation may be as valid that when the development had spread over two continents the cult significance or symbolism had been pretty well diluted, and the art lived on primarily because of its utility as decoration. But a strictly religious art, definitely limited by tradition and creed, did come full-grown into China, there to undergo modification in accordance with the settled and humanistic Chinese spirit, but to maintain at the same time some of its native Indian characteristics.

Buddhism followed the trade ways into the China of the middle Han emperors in the centuries just before and after Christ's birth. Already the Greek influence had been felt in India, and this may have had to do with the first representations of Buddha as a man, but the East could not give up its

formalism for Hellenistic realism, and the sculptural treatment remained conventional and decorative. In India certain attitudes and accessories had become stereotyped, and in another direction (carrying on a pre-Buddhist Brahmanic expression) there was a profuse, exuberant sculptural art of multiplied forms and repeated areas of high- and low relief.

All this was carried over into China bodily perhaps in certain examples of the smaller things, when in the mid-first century A.D. an emperor, having dreamed of a saint in the West, dispatched emissaries to Central Asia and received back news and tokens of Buddha and his religion. Certainly it was not much later that China became dotted with shrines and monasteries of the Buddhist faith.

Because, the new religion celebrated the human body as the temple of the spirit, man became for the first time a main motive in Chinese art. Serenity and compassion entered into the expressiveness, into attitude and facial expression on the one hand, and into the sculptural handling on the other. There came a new kind of plastic rhythm, aided by a melodious and graceful linear counterplay.

From the type figures of Buddha and Bodhisattva—a sort of midway figure between human and divine—taken bodily from India, there was to develop a long line of religious effigies, culminating in the sumptuously enriched yet calm and massively uninvolved Bodhisattvas of the T'ang era. The best of them seem to breathe a spirit of peace and harmony and repose, to suffuse the temple or shrine with spiritual light. The sculptural method is perfectly fitted to the supra-mundane intention: it reinforces the religious symbolism by its dignity and its felicitously established and delicately echoed play of volume and plane. The figures constitute an impressive reminder of the age-old truth that the spirit of an era and a people may express itself most vitally in art forms.

In the other direction, that of profuse decorative adornment of shrines and temples, Buddhist sculpture in China followed equally the tradition of India, with similar native modification. The iconography was as we have seen, fixed not only in certain attitudes of the figure—all in seated or standing positions of relaxation and repose—but in symbolic accessories such as the nimbus or halo and the draperies. In multiplying carved figures in the cave shrines and sanctuaries, the Chinese artists set these larger effigies in appropriate niches, and as in India surrounded them with countless smaller images carved in relief directly on the flanking rock walls, sometimes multiplying



*Bodhisattva on a Double Lotus Pedestal Stone T'ang Dynasty  
[Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D C]*

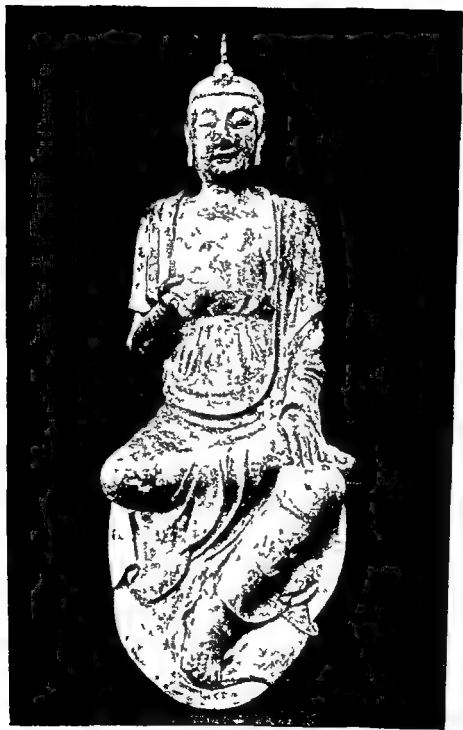
the figures till the entire cave had the effect of an abundant peopling with gods and attendant supernatural beings

The atmosphere of the cave shrines is incomparably rich, and yet austere and mysterious. Considering the wholesale nature of the sculptor's task, the artistic standard is singularly high. Detached areas of the bas-reliefs, no less than single Bodhisattvas or now removed heads, repay study. If the excellence is very like that of the earlier Brahmanic and Buddhist cave-ensembles of India, the point to remember is that there is a like high achievement marked in the two phases. In general the Chinese is a little more restrained. It rules out the sinuosity and the lighter sensuous decorativeness of the Hindu tradition, and gains thereby a new distinction. Not infrequently the Far Eastern artists introduced remnants of their vigorous animal art, as in the Yün K'ang caves at Shansi, in compositions not unlike the greatest sculptural achievements of Europe as exemplified in the cathedral tympanums at Autun, Moissac, and Vézelay.

In the Yun K'ang caves it is possible to see in the ensemble—completed after a century and a half of effort, from about 450 A.D. on—the effect of successive minor changes in style and treatment, as new waves of influence bore in from the West, or a revived breath of local tradition swayed the sculptural thought. In general, throughout the caves the colossal Buddhas are least appealing—the formalization there becoming wooden and the concentrated feeling being dispersed. The spirit of the brooding compassionate god is not magnified easily, even by the master sculptors, as had been, for instance, the rhythmic vitality, the proud boldness, of the Ordos animals when metamorphosed into the oversize stone lions and chimeras.

Often the Chinese sculptors carved stone stelæ that are like sections cut from the cave walls. Buddha sits serene in a dominating central niche, while the surrounding face of the flattened shaft is incised with low-relief Bodhisattvas and attendants, with incidental birds, abstract patternings, and so forth. Sometimes, again, the elements obviously imported with Buddhism are mixed with survivals of the ever-energetic animal art.

Finally, there is still another type of Chinese sculpture which has widely and surely captured the Western fancy. (The Chinese, by the way, consider sculpture one of their lesser arts, as compared with painting, calligraphy, and poetry.) The clay statuettes of the T'ang era comprise at once a *comédie humaine* of the cultured life of the period and a diversified and endlessly appealing exhibition of sculptural suavity, elegance, and sheer virtuosity.



*Seated Lohan Dried lacquer probably Sung Dynasty  
Collection Mrs John D Rockefeller Jr New York*



*Seated Bodhisattva Wood Sung Dynasty*  
 [Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts Boston]

This is not, like the Buddhist sculpture a result of artistic impulse carried over into religious and spiritual reverence or reverie. It is an expression rather of lighter mood of love of the graceful even the playful.

The very subjects are eloquent of a devotion to the recreational sides of life



Buddhist Stela. Detail Limestone 6th century  
[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

dancing girls, horseback-riders polo-players animal pets, musicians though there are also more serious pieces in beasts of burden, warriors, and officials But fascinating as is the documentary picture of living thus fixed for the delight and amusement of later generations, the most notable fact is the un-

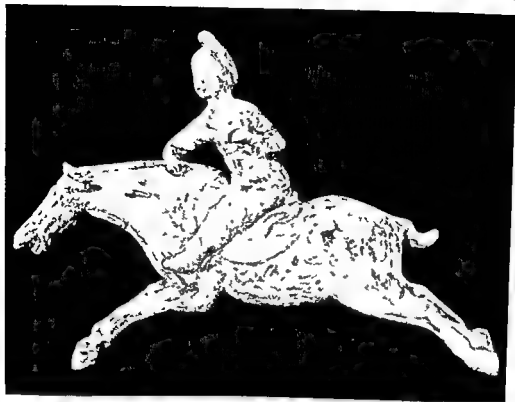




*Camel Terra cotta statuette, T'ang Dynasty*  
*[Courtesy Yamanaka & Company]*

rivalled plastic aliveness, the sculptural verve and vividness, here exhibited. Comparable to the Greek Tanagra figurines in size, method and range of intimate and genre subject matter, the Chinese statuettes are incomparably superior as pure three-dimensional examples of the sculptural art.

The dancing figure or poloist or camel or horse immortalizes the spirit or feeling of the subject, even while pushing the boundaries of miniature art into new regions of heightened expressiveness. The object in nature is penetrat-



*Polo Player Terra cotta statuette, T'ang Dynasty*  
*[Courtesy C T Loo & Company]*

ingly realized, but the camera-eye impression is thrust back, modified, transformed, till an organized equivalent, creatively shaped in the most expressive and concentrated values possible to the materials and methods of clay sculpture, takes its place. Seldom have sculptors combined, in a long series of works, such essential truth to model or character with so eloquent a rhythmic movement; seldom such an aspect of freedom and spontaneity with sound and delightful sculptural orchestration.

The statuettes are usually coloured. Commonly they are glazed, although the glaze may have been left off certain portions of the clay, where directly applied pigment gives the better effect. As glazed pieces, the statuettes are sometimes omitted from histories of sculptural art, being relegated to the books on pottery instead—as if they were not among the very masterpieces of free sculpture! In any case, their fresh liveliness, brilliant vigour, and full formal beauty are unforgettable, the source of purest æsthetic enjoyment.



*Lao-tze on a Water Buffalo* Bronze statuette Sung Dynasty  
[Courtesy Worcester Art Museum]

Fortunately the pieces are finding their way into all the larger Western museums and even masterly examples are common enough to permit modest private collectors to own them. Probably thousands of figures will yet be dug up from ancient graves. Incidentally the subjects prove as did many of the reliefs in Egyptian tombs that a people accustomed to make grave offerings need not by that token be considered inordinately sad or obsessed by grim thoughts of the after life. The Tang statuettes are joyous in theme in every sculptured syllable.

In China there grew up an exceptional sort of shallow relief art in which an elaborate story composition was outlined on the stone and the space around the figures and objects cut away to a slight depth. Flat slabs so treated might be used in series around the tomb-room and the method often is combined



*Lao-tze on a Water Buffalo* back Bronze statuette Sung Dynasty  
[Courtesy Worcester Art Museum]

with high-relief figures on the Buddhist stelæ. This sort of sculpture puts an exceptional burden on silhouette, and the virtues are linear rather than three-dimensional. Indeed many examples are nearer to engraved than to sculptured stone.

In some examples of the second century A.D. with figures done by scratch-drawing and backgrounds then chiselled out, there is the usual Chinese vigour, not without a virility reminiscent of the steppe tradition. There is too a diverting series of stories and incidents told in the idiom—myth and historical legend, barbarian custom and homeland festival—all pictorially described to which may be added homilies of filial piety, patriotic sacrifice and conjugal fidelity. A panel called *Paragons of Filial Piety* in the Boston Museum is typical. The totality of such works forms a sort of stone picture-

book of Chinese mythology, folklore, history, and etiquette. Although these early moralistic stone sculptures are the most memorable things in the mode, the shallow-relief art was practised importantly through many centuries. Some of the T'ang stelæ have panels distinguished by fullness and elegance, in the tradition.

Adding together relief and round statue, miniature and colossal figure, stone and bronze and clay, all represented by exceptionally good work, even when judged by world standards—to which may be added a high achievement in wood sculpture, incomparable jade-carving, and a unique sort of portrait sculpture in built-up lacquer—adding all these together, one has in the Chinese manifestations mankind's supreme demonstration of the possibilities and the glories of the sculptural art.



Terra cotta statuettes from graves, Northern Wei  
[Courtesy Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology, Toronto]

## CHAPTER IX

### *Chinese Painting in the Great Periods*

PAINTING is the most characteristic art of China. The sculpture is matched, part for part, in regions of the outside world, never the whole in one place, but one part in Luristan, another in India, still another in medieval France. Even the colossal ogres owe something to the Eurasian stylization that centred elsewhere. Only the grave figurines are wholly Chinese, without a suspicion of foreign parentage, and universally recognizable as Chinese. But the painting is unique, shaped by the wisdom and love and brooding of this one people, and unrivalled in its sort through all the world.

It is here that the spirit of the national art is most intensely expressed. The Chinese æsthetic canon which fixes the excellence of a painting in a vitality that is of the painting itself rather than of the life or object depicted, which is more concerned to open the way to the soul than to report to the mind—this canon is most implicit in the body of scroll and album paintings. The Oriental painter is a philosopher, a seer, an artist in living. He prepares himself for creative expression by spiritual absorption and by rigorous discipline of the active mind. Having stilled his assertive personal self, in apprehension of mystic meanings and cosmic harmonies, he comes to his brush and ink and field of silk with a supra-sensual aim.

There is more than a sympathetic link between painter and poet. The two are often combined in one person—partly to be explained by the fact that the artist's brush is the only writing medium in China, and that calligraphy itself is practised with an artist's care. For the shading of the writer's lines supports his meaning, the very strokes convey his feeling toward and the character of, the object. The purposes of the two groups of artists are alike, with a similarity not known in Western painting and poetry.

Almost throughout Western painting there is a strain of assertive ambi-

tion—an exhibitionistic spirit, a show of personal emotion, a parade of virtuosity. There is, too, for extraordinarily extended periods, the effort to rival nature, to be scientifically right. The Eastern artist is humble. A great impersonality spreads over his pictures and statues and rugs. The copying of natural aspects, the capping of nature's effects, is the least of his undertakings. He studies nature in the large, concentrating his faculties upon understanding the greatest and the smallest of her phenomena, brooding with her. But his pictures are less a report of something seen than a distillation of a mood or a spirit felt. His most potent language is not the detail or outlines of the composition observed, but the intimation that came to him in contemplation. Thus he dresses in abstraction of colour, line, plane, and volume in space, and by means of it, he conveys the inexpressible. Sketches are no part of Oriental composition.

There can be, says the Chinese, no creation of art without peace of soul. The faculty of stilling the reporting senses and the thinking mind, the faculty of expanding the soul of gazing out silently, even ecstatically, from the centre of all being—this faculty is more to be prized than anatomical knowledge and light-and-shade exactitude. To which one may add also out of the wisdom of the Orient, that there can be no profound *enjoyment* of art without inner peace.

This is not to say that Oriental art lacks magnificence or intense this-world vitality. It is full, vigorous, and rich. At times it runs off into extravagances of colour, ornament, or meaninglessly repeated forms. But even in its excesses, the impersonality is likely to remain. The melodramatic sentiment and forced action of Pergamene sculpture, for instance, would be incomprehensible in the Far East, for its emphasis upon story and personal emotion, no less than the realistic intention and the lack of formal organization, marks the development as utterly alien to Eastern intention and spirit.

Some commentators explain Oriental art as primarily symbolic. Even Japanese writers have emphasized this explanation as a bridge between Eastern achievement and Western enjoyment, and indeed Japanese painting and sculpture are far more marked with symbolism than the Chinese. But those who have fully savoured and enjoyed a Sung mountain scene or a Han "unnatural" beast are likely to cry danger at the intrusion of symbol-seekers. A symbolic work, in the general understanding, is that which sets up one intellectual concept to suggest another. Symbolism is a matter of the thinking mind—and intellectualization is very far from the heart of Oriental art.

It is rather expressionism that is characteristically illustrated in the great body of Asiatic art. Even as that term is used, somewhat narrowly, by the current modernists, it fits Eastern art better than it does any large development of Western art before the post-impressionists. Expressionism's three notable traits or qualities may be marked as essentials of Chinese art: utmost exploitation of the peculiar materials and methods of the art, resulting in logical form-organization and rich sensuous values; exceptional reliance upon abstract means and universal rhythms; and expression in terms of the inner understanding or essential "structure" of the subject, rather than by outward or accidental aspects. The intention is to fix the feeling of the thing rather than to reproduce its dimensions and outlines and material details. It is significant that the Chinese, in the first of their canons of painting, speak of rhythmic life or formal movement, where the Japanese speak of decorative and symbolic qualities.

In general the symbols in Oriental art are an added rather than an essential interest, lying beyond the values of the created, æsthetically moving complex of formal elements. If the word "symbol" is used more loosely, not in the sense of one idea standing for another but in the sense, for instance, of a landscape suggesting perceptions larger than itself—evoking a sense of peace, and by further extension occasioning a feeling of release from the turmoil and dust of city-bound existence—then Oriental painting may also be said to be richly symbolic. But it is only in religious painting, chiefly Buddhistic, that a set of symbols, as objects or attitudes or emblems standing for intellectual concepts, is common.

The reliance upon symbolism as an explanation seems to be due to the intellectualist critic's necessity for finding some reason for the hold of Oriental art upon great numbers of people. An appreciation of formal excellence as such has been the least common attainment of the educated "art lover" of Europe and America. The more learned, the less feeling for abstract, plastic, and deeply rhythmic values. Western education has been busy pointing out how cleverly the painter has mastered anatomy and scientific perspective and a marvellous fidelity of representation, to which is added instruction about the significance of the subject-matter. Naturally the observer misses these "cardinal virtues" in the gallery of Chinese or Japanese art. The perspective is non-existent, the fidelity is to aspects of nature never brought to his attention; and if there is a story element it is from an alien mythology or a little understood way of life. He is baffled on all the counts academically dis-



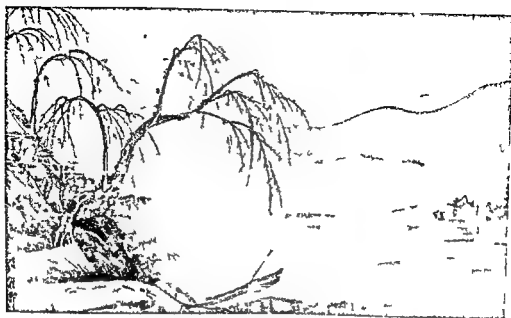
cussed and praised content, technique, truth, moral purpose. He simply has not been prepared to recognize this other virtue in which, he is told, Oriental art excels—this abstract, vital, and expressive form-value. Yet every initiate, every graduate from the over-intellectualized art of the West to the formalized art of the East, repeats that here are pleasures unexampled, here are harmonies unguessed in the Western modes of art, here is *experience* of art at its purest and most satisfying levels.

The final answer to the one who wishes to enter this field of delights is that he must put himself into the way of continual contact with the actual paintings and sculptures. There is no substitute for experience. That he will come to appreciate them is certain, if only he will make sure of open-mindedness and communion. Meanwhile, he can aid in his own progress toward understanding—can help emancipate himself from orthodox Western narrowness, by remembering these few basic differences.

Oriental art is not realistic or reproductive. It is considered by its practitioners to be a way of creation, concerned with life-values not to be observed or illustrated in terms of the casual and ephemeral aspects of outward nature. It depends first upon distillation of feeling and then upon expression in nearly abstract elements. On the appreciation side also, art is considered a spiritual concern. Like all spiritual activities it presupposes calm in the mind and heart, and quietude in the soul. In turn it brings peace, permits blissful comprehension, puts one within the light at the centre of the universe. If one insists upon living life with the brain ever active, scheming, demanding, if one continues to distrust all that is beyond logic and sight, in short, if one refuses to be to some extent a mystic, one might as well give over the arts of the East—except for their gorgeous sensuous colour and formal pattern. But for him who makes the effort, challenges his own tight-mindedness and achieves re-education and a new receptivity, there are undreamed glories in those rolled-up scrolls.

When Indian Buddhist sculpture was introduced full-matured into China, an equally idiomatic art of mural painting came with it. The examples still existing fragmentarily in cave shrines—as modified by Chinese ideas and methods—are by no means negligible or uninteresting, and they led on to a recognizably Chinese Buddhist art, but they are, by reason of the foreign element, out of the main line of development of a characteristic native art.

There had already been, long before, expert and original practice. If one is



Chi'en Hsuan *Winter Landscape* 13th century  
[Courtesy Fogg Art Museum Harvard University]

inclined to suspect the literary records which ascribe activities in portraiture, illustration of legend and history, and purely decorative painting to the centuries before Christ, there are nevertheless great painted building tiles produced not later than the second century B.C., in which the future direction of drawing and painting seems already fixed. The floating of the figures in pregnant space, the delicate brush-touch, the calligraphic sensitiveness of the lines, the expressionistic concentration on essentials—all this seems learned by the artists long since. There is here indeed not the directness and nature-distortion of primitivism but of maturely considered plastic expression, felt for along a path leading directly away from realism. Greek painting had at this time arrived at the other end of the path at naturalism after a long progression from the exquisite formalism of Exekias and Euphronios. In the subject-matter, or rather subject-approach, too, the main road of Chinese painting was already indicated—not through the eyes but through some deeper sensibility.

For eight hundred years afterward, practically every painted work will be lost. But if one puts Tang or Sung scrolls beside these early tiles, it becomes clear that in the intervening centuries, eight or ten or twelve in number, a

straight course had been run, the art being gradually refined and perfected rather than changed. The tempered vigour, poetic concentration of statement, and light sensitive method are a racial characteristic.

Written records of certain lost works of that millennium survive. They leave no doubt that the art was almost continuously fostered.

Arthur Waley includes in *The Temple and Other Poems* a translation of Wang Yen-Shou's "Description of the Ling-Kuan Palace," written in the second century A.D. The palace that so impressed the poet was a provincial one, constructed by a brother of the famous Emperor Wu. The opening lines describe the sculptural adornments (of a sort obviously related to the art of the steppes) and the later lines are on the painted murals.

Birds of the air, beasts of the earth  
 Sprout from the timber, to swift-slanting beams  
 The coursing tiger clings or perilously leaping  
 In a wild onrush rears his shocky mane.  
 A young dragon wreathes his coils,  
 And as he prances seems to nod his slithery head  
 And here all Heaven and Earth is painted all living things  
 After their tribes, and all wild marryings  
 Of sort with sort, strange Spirits of the Sea,  
 Gods of the Hills To all their thousand guises  
 Had the painter formed  
 His reds and blues

One is reminded that in the eighth century a military leader had eighteen painters decorate a temple, and considered their work so incomparably fine that he straightway had all eighteen put to death so that the success should never be repeated for his rivals.

There are even a few rare examples attributed to known artists of the period. Ku K'ai-Chih, of the fourth century, reputed to have been an unsurpassed master, accomplished alike in Buddhist symbolic painting and genre subjects, is represented by a serial scroll painting now in the British Museum, known as *The Admonitions of the Instructress in the Palace*, and by a roll in the Freer collection. Both show an extraordinary subtlety, characteristic mastery of expressive line, and compositional surety. They may be copies by later masters or by hacks—and so either better or worse than the originals. Copying was an honourable and useful activity through all later eras, with a reasonable if not spiritual justification in the Chinese belief that the work of art is a living life-giving entity in its own right. One of its ways



Mu Ch'i: *Tiger and Waterfall*. Sung Dynasty  
[Courtesy British Museum]



*Tung Yuan Landscape Scroll Detail Sung Dynasty*  
[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts Boston]

landscape treatment. All carry considerably beyond the intention of the 'nature painting' of the Occident which, of course, was not invented until eight centuries later. The Chinese term that corresponds to the word 'landscape' signifies literally 'mountain and water'. Through all after-ages the artist will be trying to distil the essence of these freest of natural elements, mountains and still or flowing water. As the Taoist sages sought the secret of repose and divine identification in the fastnesses farthest from cities, war and dust, so the painters sought to fix the feeling of cosmic penetration and absolute spirituality in mountain-and-water pictures. Perhaps nowhere else has religious feeling so perfectly shaped a form of artistic expression.

Already in the eighth century there were different methods and schools. An especially quiet, miniature-like style is ascribed to the first masters. There were too poet-painters, who fixed in drawings on silk the emotional inwardness of a word-picture. To say that these pictorial analogues to literary compositions are themselves literary would be to overstate the case: there is no story-interest, no narrative, no transfer of described elements. Rather they are attempts to crystallize, in terms of the other medium, the subjective mood or perception that evoked the poem. It should hardly be necessary to stress a

like reticence, even slightness of body, in the two arts, even within the fullest formal and sensuous expressiveness.

The literary association is further recalled in the often-remarked calligraphic character of the linear parts of the design. In Chinese writing the signs are from pictographic origins, that is, the word is a shorthand depiction of the object named, now nearly abstract though with some faint likeness. Beyond the type sign as such there is additional meaning in the way in which the symbol is inscribed, in the flow of the line, its crispness or softness, its delicacy or vigour.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that writing, under these conditions, becomes a fine art in itself. For instance, the single character for "man" would be shaded and "composed" to signify weak man or strong man, coward or hero, partly by the weakness or virility and verve of the brush-strokes. This is the element that cannot be translated when Chinese poems are brought over into the non-pictographic languages, leaving us, usually, with a denatured intellectual equivalent.

Written poems, then, assumed an artistic character due partly to the sensitiveness and creative shading of the calligraphy and the total visual effect of the manuscript. Handling of the brush became expert and expressive to an extent undreamed in the Western world. And naturally with the poet and painter in the Orient so close together in intention, both finding their material in subjective emotion and intuition, and their method in suggestion, there resulted a strong calligraphic character in the painting, as seen in outlines almost unbelievably revealing and in a play of fluent and broken line like woven counterpoint.

As an indication of the extent to which the Chinese prized, and still prize, the beauty in writing, one may quote Han Yü, a poet who lived from 768 to 824. He wrote of the inscriptions on some historic stone drums

Time has not yet vanquished the beauty of these letters—  
*Looking like sharp daggers that pierce live crocodiles,*  
*Like phoenix-masks dancing like angels hovering down,*  
*Like trees of jade and coral with interlocking branches,*  
*Like golden cord and iron chain tied together tight,*  
*Like incense-tripods flung in the sea, like dragons*  
*mounting heaven.* <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Walter Breyer's translation in *The Jade Mountain: A Chinese Anthology*, quoted by courtesy of the publisher Alfred A. Knopf.



Kuo Hsi *Shou y Mountains* Detail Sung Dynasty  
[Courtesy Toledo Museum of Art]

Laurence Binyon goes to the length of claiming that "painting, for the Chinese, is a branch of handwriting." The primary materials, brush and Chinese ink—an ink with almost magical tonal possibilities—are the same in the two arts. The method of direct application upon silk or soft paper excludes all possibility of "working over" or correcting, and so the paintings have, as a group, a freshness and vitality seldom approached elsewhere.

Binyon, most sensitive among the pioneer interpreters of Oriental art to the West, explains illuminatingly how the calligraphic method and the poet's approach result in the effect of important space, of aliveness in those parts of the field where line and colour and object are not. He writes "The artist closely observes and stores his observations in his memory. He conceives the design, and having completed the mental image of what he intends to paint, he transfers it swiftly and with sure strokes to the silk . . . The qualities prized by the Chinese in a small ink-painting of bamboos, a favourite subject alike with beginners and masters, are those prized in a piece of fine handwriting, only there is added a keen appreciation of the simultaneous seizure of

life and natural character in the subject . It is said that in a master's work 'the idea is present even where the brush has not passed ' And thus emphasis on the value of suggestion, of reserves and silences, is important to notice, because no other art has understood like the Chinese how to make empty space a potent factor in the design "

Other authorities put less stress upon the handwriting element, insisting that we have here a case of parallel development rather than a proven derivation of drawing out of writing custom In view of the latest discoveries, particularly the paintings on tiles, an argument might be made for draughtsmanship as the earlier development, written language the later, that is, calligraphy may be what it is because early drawing and painting were so strong, sensitive, and expressive In either case, the significant point is the mastery that reveals, in a bit of eloquent line, forms and forces that elsewhere are not so well brought out by all the resources of line, chiaroscuro, and perspective

The landscape paintings, of course, shaded off into other types landscapes with figures, for instance, leading over into genre In the other direction, there came masters devoted particularly to flower studies, and bird and animal paintings To all this there was the parallel development of religious painting, revealing and gorgeous in its own way, and of portraiture There were, too, in the T'ang period and the following era of the Five Dynasties (in the tenth century) many fluctuations of style and method

Nevertheless, painting, unlike sculpture, came to its culminating excellence only in the Sung era (960-1276) There was a painter-emperor, Hui Tsung, who set out to make his court a centre of the arts and to transform his realm by official promotion of cultural activities He collected five thousand paintings in one of the earliest of the "national galleries" and formed an academy Perhaps, like Ikhnaton in Egypt, he gave too much attention to matters spiritual and artistic, and neglected the army At any rate the Tatars overran his empire and sent him into exile, where he died During the century or so that it took for the nation to absorb its new conquerors, the painters are said to have indulged the already developed taste for retreat from the active and troubled world The art is then most eloquent of the regions propitious for spiritual serenity and repose the inward world of the soul, and mountain fastnesses, and dreams must-covered fields Thus a slight influence toward realism, felt during Hui Tsung's reign, was turned back

As typical of the diversity in any one period, it may be noted that in the





Hsu Shih-Ch'ang *Landscape* Sung Dynasty  
[Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art Washington D.C.]

late Sung era Li T'ang and his pupils, Hsia Kuei and Ma Yuan, developed—according to Binyon—"landscape at its finest, synthetic in conception, unpassioned in execution, it unites simplicity with grandeur", even while Li Sung-Nien was carrying on older currents of historical painting, and transcripts of contemporary living, and while others transformed Buddhist votive art into gorgeously decorative hangings, and still others delighted in naturalistic accuracy. *There are eight hundred names of painters recorded from the Sung era.* All of these currents carried on into the Ming era—but that is down in the period of the European Renaissance, and thus belongs to a later chapter.

What is it that so greatly signifies in a Sung landscape? It is, of course, the total æsthetic impression or evocation—a thing undefinable and elusive. There is no other type of art in which the excellence so withdraws in the face of analysis. But because of the strangeness of the Eastern painting to average Western eyes, it would seem, for once, useful to trace down the various component elements, actually to pick to pieces one of these fragile works.

Here is a mountain-and-water picture ascribed by the experts of the Freer Gallery to the twelfth century. It is entitled *The Emperor Wên Meets the Sage Tzu-Ya*, but obviously the subject interest is not of primary significance to the beholder. To the informed Chinese the knowledge of circumstance, legend, and correlative literary treatment doubtless adds overtones of meaning, pointing up the rightness of this particular setting and of the artist's blending of calm and magnificence. But one needs no literary or historic key to recognize that the work is a formal masterpiece. Of subject-matter in the other sense, disregarding figures and legend, there is a transcript or distillation of natural scene, constituting a typically fine instance of "simplicity with grandeur." Specifically one may note the essential tree character, the rock structure, and the peacefulness of water, all cushioned in the atmosphere of mountainous grandeur.

All that seems secondary, however, to the symphonic orchestration of formal elements. The sense of movement is extraordinary, yet the picture is poised, reposeful. Every element of design in one half of the picture field—beginning with tumbled volumes, aggressive line, and clashing planes—is in contrast with the melodious, melting lyric planes, lines, and volumes of the other half. Nor is the vigour of the main plastic rhythm destructive of that flatness which is a first law of decorative painting. Both the absence of natural shadow and the Oriental method of "laying up" the picture instead of employing scientific perspective contribute to this shallow effect of the field.



*The Emperor Wen Meets the Sage Tzu-Ya Sung Dynasty*  
 [Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.]

This is a composition, incidentally, which, after the observer has noted the striking division into a sumptuously filled and "forward" left half and a spacious, light, and distant right half, rewards the roaming eye with charming minor hints: the area with the two figures, the little tree to the lower right, characterful as tree but serving as a richly textured hint to the formal ensemble,

and the hidden inlet way over at the middle left. But the focus of interest, compositionally and psychologically—the point at which the vision comes to rest, to which the eye returns gratefully after each further circuit of the field—is that misty, harmonious pregnant space at upper centre

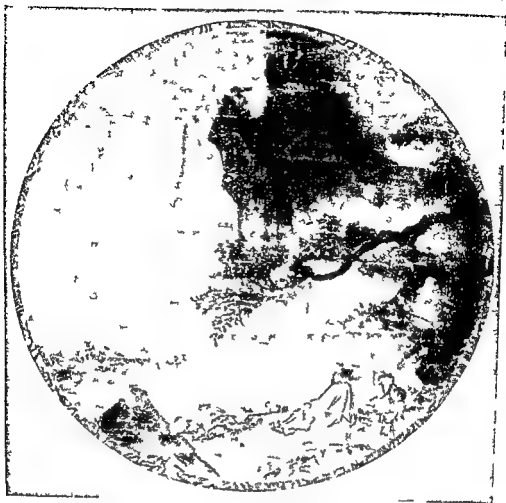
And that brings one to the truth that ultimately the painter's intention and achievement centre in something that can be neither depicted nor described. The final thing posed in this picture is an intangible, a feeling or mood, an evocation.

Objectively this is achieved by understatement. The deeper communication is by abstract means by a peculiarly full synthesis of formal elements, a sparing use of objective means. The result, the beholder's response, is, like the artist's approach, nearer to contemplation than to observation. One knows that nature has been penetrated, profoundly understood, reflected upon, then harmonized, lifted toward the transcendental. To the mystic, nature is no external thing, to be brought forward as an exhibit for enjoyment. The deeper service is to carry the awareness of man to that centre of oneness at which all men and all natural phenomena exist.

Just as one might dwell on those bits where the 'treatment' seems especially felicitous—on minor charming passages—so one might pause to enjoy, separately, so to speak, the virtuosity of single formal elements such as line or colour. The sensitive calligraphic line might be studied better, perhaps, in the economical depictions of bird or flower or animal which breed despair in the Western draughtsman: so incomparably sensitive and expressive is the delineation. What exquisite balance of form and character there is, too, in the drawing of Ma Yuan's *Landscape with Bridge and Willow* and of Ch'en Jung's *Nine Dragons* scroll!

Colour is seldom a stressed element in Chinese landscape painting. The lightest touch or faintest wash may be added to the monochrome picture, or as often omitted. But monochrome in Chinese ink is not monotone in the Western sense. The range of effects is enormous, the shadings innumerable.

Colour rises to a dominating impression, however, in the *Shuang and Yü* paintings. The rich play of hue and texture in some of the *Shuang and Yü* pictures is gorgeous beyond description. We see the *Shuang and Yü* pictures.



*Style of Ma Yuan Sage in Meditation Sung Dynasty*  
[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts Boston]

painting is found in magnificent variations in Tibet and even more notably in Korea

The frescoes touched a level not surpassed for decorative richness in any other world manifestation. The rhythmic adjustment of figures, the vigorous linear interplay, the incomparable Chinese patterning with sensuously seductive colour—all this is to be seen as vitally achieved even in fragmentary compositions. Such is *A Vision of Kuan-Yin*, a Ming fresco of 1551 in the Boston Museum.

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*Style of Ma Yuan Sage in Meditation Sung Dynasty*  
[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts Boston]

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Ch'en Jung *Dragon in Water* Detail from *The Nine Dragons Scroll* Sung Dynasty  
 [Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

The roll paintings of the Chinese and Japanese are of a type unknown to the West. The artist begins his picture at one end of a band of silk and works his episodic legend or landscape continuously to the other end. The work is ordinarily kept rolled. It may be displayed, as in our museums, open at a particularly delectable passage, or, in the Oriental fashion, unrolled progressively at a sitting, and enjoyed bit by bit through the whole sequence. The unusual continuous form demands a special fluent technique: the picture must go forward rhythmically, so to speak, yet present a unified pictorial entity in each segment.

The pleasure of unrolling the landscape of a master-painter, pausing as one pleases, losing one's outward self in the slowly changing visual experience, is a form of aesthetic enjoyment different from any known to Western peoples. The mechanics of unrolling and rerolling the silk field is as natural as turning to see the changing landscape as one walks through woods and meadows, as automatic as the turning of the leaves of an absorbing book.

Again, and finally, it is the mood that counts when one wanders in a gallery of Chinese mountain-and-water pictures. If one comes with peace in one's heart, with the inner eye open, there is the balm of soul-absorption. It is not passivity, absence of experience, a mere withdrawal, rather there is



dynamic movement in these things, a positive formal experience. But it is transmitted by a method which prepares the observer for reposeful consideration, an enjoyment within stillness.

Are there European painters of landscape who afford this fresh evocative stimulation? In this company Corot seems weak, Turner structureless, the school of Constable pasty and heavy. Cézanne almost alone, perhaps some of his near-abstractionist followers, have touched upon the realm of this art at once formal and reminiscent. The real Western fellow-artists, mystically symphonic, are Bach and Beethoven, Mozart and Handel—or the poets Wordsworth and Shelley.

Hsieh Ho, a painter and writer of the sixth century, set down a word-summary of Chinese aesthetics which has become famous and familiar wherever art students gather. In the first of his "canons" he expressed, better than any modern, the heart of the present-day modernist belief. He said that first of all the painting should have "rhythmic vitality and a life-movement of its own." Other translations are "Operation of the spirit of life-movement", "Rhythmic vitality, or spiritual rhythm expressed in the movement of life", and "The life-movement of the spirit through the rhythm of things."

It is notable that this summary fits both Oriental art as an entity at the opposite pole from Western classic art, and modern expressionist art. The emphasis upon a certain sort of movement, upon rhythmic vitality, and upon the spiritual element parallels a great deal that has been written recently upon movement within the canvas ("plastic orchestration" is the modern's term), upon formal expressiveness, and upon the abstract element that is a sort of language of the soul. But most remarkable, from the "advanced" point of view, is the stress upon a life *in the painting*. For it is fundamental to all thinking about the arts that one recognize two intentions in two vast bodies of works: one the mirroring of the life around us, the other the creation of a new thing that has a living animation—i.e., a life-movement—of its own.

The Chinese consider the mirroring or imitation of natural phenomena secondary. The primary aim is to endow the work with the elements of life—movement, inspiration, the power to communicate—rather than to mirror or interpret. What else, they ask, does *creation* mean?

In other words, the artist, by identifying himself with the spirit, enters into the rhythm out of which all life is created. Out of the cosmic well of creation he carries the breath of the spirit into the material work of art, endows it

with in-spiring life, with potential energy, with ordered movement in line, volume, and colour. If he has great vigour, sensitiveness, serenity, nobility, in his own soul, the painting will breathe forth something of those qualities. Its way of life will be an extension of his way of life. But the first requirement is that it shall itself be rhythmically and spiritually living.

And "when the rhythm is found, we feel that we are put into touch with life, not only our own life, but the life of the whole world."<sup>1</sup>

It will not escape the Western student that Hsieh Ho begins at the very opposite end of the æsthetic field from that which seemed of first importance to Aristotle and to most orthodox Western theorists down to the early twentieth century. To him it would have been inexplicable that the artist should be bound by the Greek canon, "Art is imitation."

There are five more canons in Hsieh Ho's "principles." They have to do, roughly, with structure, harmony with the forms of nature, colour, composition or space division "according to hierarchic order," and transmission of what the masters have already gained. Other Chinese artists and sages have penned rules almost as pithy and suggestive.

The Chinese, with their passion for ordering and explaining the elements of art, did not, of course, escape the narrowing effect of codifying the acceptable "rules" of composition. The stultifying effects of formula-making were to be observed over long periods, and after the Ming era the history of the arts will be one long record of lifeless repetition and academic exercise. Considering the essential creativeness of the traditional models, it is no wonder that even the copies were at times endowed with extraordinary formal values. There came to be an art, too frankly competitive within very restricted limits: painters attempting, for instance, to fix on the silk the most intensely concentrated feeling of bamboo or mice or water-grass. The results are often formally lovely, though they range off into dryly intellectual effects which rest, for full enjoyment, upon knowledge of tradition and the previous achievement.

It is easy to see that when all subject materials have been reduced to formulas, so that it is accepted that there are sixteen ways to draw mountains, and exact laws govern the representation of pines or waterfalls or figures, something of life has been excluded from painting. But the history of the

<sup>1</sup> Laurence Binyon in *The Flight of the Dragon*. The quotations from Binyon earlier in the chapter are from his essay on Chinese Painting in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. I owe a debt also to his latest book *The Spirit of Man in Asian Art* and to the volumes of Waley, Giles, Petrucci, Carter and Silcock. See the bibliography for annotations about these.



*Waterfall Trees and Two Eagles Sung Dynasty  
[Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art Washington D C]*

art of painting in China embraces so many periods of surpassing loveliness that the lifeless or imitative interludes may well be forgotten

If there is no mention of Chinese architecture as an art related to the unexcelled sculpture and painting it is not because the building art was less

esteemed or that it was only negligibly practised. Rather it is that the monuments—sufficiently described in the ancient books—have almost totally disappeared. What notable buildings survive from the past are of the Ming and later dynasties, and what little is worth recounting of earlier architectural history is better appended to the chapter that treats of post-Renaissance Oriental art. Japanese architecture, too, as known in surviving examples, is of that time. For convenience, and because Japan's *distinctive* achievement comes late, that nation's painting and sculpture also are excluded here. It is time to go back to the beginnings of another Oriental story—the Hindu.

## CHAPTER X



### *India and Man's Soul, Cambodia and the Senses*

A LITTLE girl taken to see the Oriental art in a great museum, was asked to regard a bronze statue of a Hindu deity. Then shyly "Why has he six arms?"

That was the Western mind speaking a departure from natural truth noted and questioned. It was Western education on guard. The mind thus roused and eager for "reasons" would, the Oriental believes, stand in the way of æsthetic response and the enjoyment of form. And indeed it is Western education that makes necessary an explanation of a different approach to art before appreciation is attempted.

The distinctiveness of Indian art begins in an attitude toward the soul. For a while, a few centuries, Buddhism modified the spiritual preoccupation of the Hindu artist, introducing a more humanistic interest and intention. But at the beginning and at the end the Brahmanic abstract attitude prevailed. A very great deal of early Indian art, even up to the time of the Islamic invasions, has to do at least nominally with religion, the great mass of it is shaped in accordance with a racial philosophy and a certain psychological intention.

The soul, says the Hindu sage, is the only reality. Its satisfaction is the only real happiness. The individual man, in permitting himself to slip into a life of materialistic activities and sense-pleasures, is obscuring the true reality and preventing the illumination that comes with the submergence of self in the universal soul. By giving his allegiance to the world and its diversions he is delaying the return of his own spirit to the source, to the fountain of existence, the realm of light and tranquillity and bliss from which it has been separated. The things that seem so real, in outward life, are a sort of deception. Turn within. Shun the visible. Happiness, knowledge, immortality, are only in the soul conscious of itself.

Out of such statements—insofar as words can be substituted for the inaudible language of the soul—can be pieced a suggestion of the philosophy of the Hindu.

Insofar as art is visible, concrete, it partakes of the nature of the phenomenal world. It cannot be wholly of the Absolute. Brahmanism leads inevitably to asceticism and to denial of the pleasures and facts of sense. Art, in that it enters the beholder's or listener's consciousness through a sense-channel, and moreover is commonly folded within a superadded sensuousness of its own, is suspect.

But an abstract philosophy must have its prophets and teachers to make a bridge of ideas to the people. Art has a way of carrying a message, of thus serving the prophet and seer. Art has, moreover, hidden in itself, a portion of the Absolute. It holds in solution something of the inner light, at its best and most abstract, it crystallizes the universal plan. Above all, the image may be an instrument for release from casual life, may serve as agent for identifying the individual consciousness with the deity. Therefore, the activities of the artist are permitted even in a Brahmin-guided civilization.

In a helpful and suggestive book, *Form and Colour*, Lisle March Phillipps has analysed the Western and Eastern approaches to art, and in summary of the Hindu attitude has written "India's only teachers, her only professors are those solitary dreamers who, remote from books and all the paraphernalia of research, commune with the infinite in their own souls. India has built up no edifice of mundane knowledge and appears in all ages to have been totally regardless of all mere intellectual achievement. She is not interested in the world we live in, and knows little or nothing about its anatomy and its laws. She is not interested in man and knows little or nothing about his history and exploits. The first Indian seer who started the race on a spiritual career, of which the denial of material existence was an essential condition, laid the axe to the root of all art as well as all secular science of whatsoever kind."

There is a body of Indian art that refutes the sweeping implication of this statement. Nevertheless Mr Phillipps's summary is useful as a reminder of the philosophic-ascetic ideal which has been an influence—some would say a drag—upon Indian creativeness. Essentially the culture of India is Hindu or Brahmanistic, and the qualities in the native art that distinguish it from the manifestations of all other races must be understood in the light of a supra-sensuous intention.

Indian art is not, by token of being religious, austere or gloomy or remote. As compared with the Chinese, it is man-centred, sense-delighting, and often artfully graceful. It is exuberantly rhythmical, and at times feverishly, deliriously glowing and luxuriant. Yet in the large it belongs characteristically to the body of Oriental culture. Despite its substantially Iranian origin, it, like the Persian, is related to the Chinese by its non-imitational intention and its conventional method, and by the way of life of the shaping artists. Like those others, it outwardly leans toward a frank formalism and away from realism. It partakes of the Oriental fullness and richness. What may be termed its philosophic texture is unmistakably Asiatic.

Of all Eastern countries India is strangest to the Western mind, and Indian art is at first most puzzling. The religion that is spiritual rather than theocratic, the knowledge that is sought as a means to release from material reality, instead of as practical mastery over it, and the art that exists less to depict and re-create external living than to lead into a fresh sort of experience—these are alike alien and baffling to the pragmatic European mind.

Sculpture is the leading art and the human figure is overwhelmingly the subject, but anatomical accuracy and individual portraiture are hardly known. Genre is absent. The single figure is almost uniformly that of a man touched with divinity, a legendary character abstractly considered. The beholder's interest is not in personality or verisimilitude, it is in the image as a bridge to contemplation. The figure is of Buddha or Bodhisattva in order that the beholder may achieve the release and the participation the soul desires. Or it is of Vishnu or Siva as embodiments of religious concepts. The art is incidental, instinctive, incanted, not dwelt upon. The appeal is to a region lying beyond familiar fact and apart from interest in a model. It touches deeper than the storehouse of memory and the mind's associative mechanisms.

Appropriately, there grew up parallel to Buddhist sculptural art a type of abstract design in line, hardly more than mathematical diagramming, which served the same purpose. Through intense contemplation it led to identification of the beholder with the source of all diagramming and all that is universal in life and art. In sculpture the subject-matter was necessarily suggestive, and the surface treatment may be noted as rhythmic and musical, and thus calculated to still the mind and evoke the mood of detachment. But under all is the austere, abstract structure, the cosmic diagram.

There are, of course, minor arts, a steady production of decorative utensils and accessories, and branchings of sculpture into seductive ornamental trap-

pings But seldom has the body of serious art in a great country remained so steadfastly within religious and undocumentary limits Within those limits it is rich, pervasive, and eye-filling Incidentally sculpture and architecture form part of the common background in India, of the environment of the masses It is part of the story too that the whole rich pageant unfolds with hardly a record of an artist's name.

When the Aryan-speaking invaders from the northwest, from Persia or Afghanistan, drove the Dravidian peoples southward from the Indus Valley to the lower peninsula, art already had a history in India There are prehistoric cave paintings in the Vindhya Mountains strangely like the Palæolithic murals in France and Spain The relics of the later prehistoric ages are commonly like those of Europe and of other parts of Asia. The remains of the Neolithic and first metal cultures include stone weapons, pottery, sculptured fetishes, and dolmens A great number of square seals with relief figures, mostly animals, suggest a link with the Sumerian civilization near its beginnings

In the millennium between 1500 B C. and 500 B C. the nation became truly Indian, with the Iranian element absorbed but dominating No fair estimate is possible of the comparative influence of persisting cultures of the Dravidian tribes But the emergent Vedic religion is that of the Iranian conquerors, and there are other evidences that the national culture substantially came with the invaders or was developed by them. The rigid caste system was in part a device to perpetuate the "superior" racial element in its purity And indeed the eventual rule of the country was to lie with the Brahmans, once they established themselves as the only priests and teachers Even though Buddhism, which was destined to prevail as the religion of a large part of the Orient, was born in India, and challenged the Hinduism of the Brahmans for ten centuries, it ultimately failed to shake either the religion of the Brahmans or the caste system which they decreed.

What may be termed typical Indian sculpture is first found at the time of Asoka, an emperor of the Maurya dynasty who in the mid-third century B C. declared Buddhism the official religion of the country The nation had long been divided into a large number of independent states, these in turn rooted in a widespread family or clan organization It is said that Asoka imported sculptors and that their "court" art is different from that of the already well-developed native tradition But it is a puzzle whence could have come





Uma Bronze South India 12th 14th century  
[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts Boston]

artists so masterly Greek sculpture had long since become decadent, it was at this time realistic and sensational Alexander the Great had invaded Northern India a century earlier and had established a chain of Asiatic-Greek colonies or cities, and it may be that some fortunate intermarriage of Greek with Oriental impulse had bred a vision beyond the Hellenistic.

A more likely conjecture, on stylistic evidence, is that the source is Persian. At Persepolis the *Achæmenid* development had left monuments not without affinity to the best-known Asokan works, and sculptors borrowed from the contemporary Seleucid civilization of Persia would carry on a tradition fittingly Oriental but long since exposed to Hellenistic contact. In any case "court style" and native tradition soon flowed into one characteristic way of art, and for sixteen hundred years there is an unmistakably Indian accomplishment.

The so-called "primitive" convention of frontality long persists, and there is an air of formalism throughout, an obvious carelessness about natural law. In the single religious figure a certain repose, a silent quality in the stone, is faithfully preserved, as might be expected where the purpose of the image is primarily to assist meditation and to promote the mood in which union with the divine is possible.

When the Western mind considers the adherence to conventions, the impersonal purpose of the statue, and the abstract core, it appears strange that these Hindu figures are endowed with so great a measure of rhythmic excellence, and particularly that the sculptural quality lies in the direction of sensuous and melodic loveliness. The volume is full. The rhythms are fluent and caressing. The actual bodies are physically superb, over on the fruitful side. Seldom has sculpture in stone so capitalized a certain soft loveliness of the human figure. These are not, we are compelled to remind ourselves, nudes for the sake of the nude, or for the sake of the art that can use the body as medium for romantic imaginings. The quality we enjoy as the art of it, the æsthetic compulsion, is a formal by-product of religious purpose.

Of course the strictly religious image soon ran off into a more decorative sort of composition, particularly into stories of the life of the Buddha composed into panels, medallions, and friezes. The figures were then multiplied and became intertwined with ornamental motives. Finally the melodic rhythms were built up into lush patternings of swelling forms and flowing lines. The sensuous curves were forced into seductively sinuous arabesques.

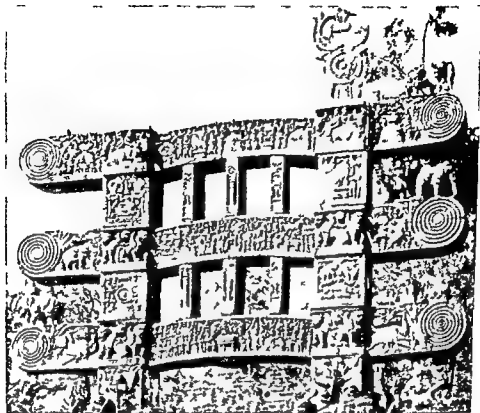
There are critics who, failing to recognize the deeper significance of the



*Kali with Cymbals* Bronze 14th century

[Courtesy William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art Kansas City]

single Buddha figure—knowing in themselves perhaps nothing of the expressed inner life of the spirit—mark the profuse and luxuriant decorative sculpture as the typically Indian thing. Thus Elie Faure speaks again and again of the *sesui al* quality of Indian art of its intoxicated luxuriance and its riotous liberty. Faure usefully points out a connexion of sculpture and architectural ornament with the fecundity of the Indian land, the pantheism of its early peoples and the easy pleasures of living. When the Iranian invaders



Sculptures on the Sanchi Gate

[James Fergusson *Tree and Serpent Worshipped*]

indeterminate sculpture that ramifies and spawns in every corner eating the stone mothlike to rags and tatters—what is the explanation of it all or why do such words as fantastic, whimsical and capricious and the like spring to our lips to describe it? The answer is simple. All these portents are rendered possible by the abolition of the law of function. They represent the invading jungle of whims and impulses which always spring up when the controlling hand is withdrawn.

But at the other end, and still within the decorated loaded art there are rich but controlled architectural panels and the extraordinary animal sculpture in relief silhouette and full-rounded figure of the Sanchi gates.

The sum of it is that the unnamed Indian sculptors raised bas relief and

high-relief art to an eye-filling richness never surpassed elsewhere, but carried on from masterpieces of luxuriant modelling to riotous confusion and an almost frenzied lavishness. Outside this rather fevered and obtrusive display is that other body of calm, exquisite figuring. It holds to the essential dignity of the human soul without denying sensuous appeal.

In India the historical landmarks, in dynasties, conquests, and wars, are comparatively unimportant, as are the divisions by centuries. The basic fact is the Iranian invasion leading to the Vedic religion and philosophy, which in turn fixed the never-shaken caste system. The Buddha Gautama came, in the sixth century B.C., and profoundly affected rather than overcame Hinduism as perpetuated by the Brahmin caste. Asoka is the one pivotal political figure uniting India, officially recognizing Buddhism. Then after eight centuries the Brahmins rule again, Buddhism is tolerated and even continuously practised—though it is in India far less determining as religion and philosophy than in China and Japan and Tibet.

The cycle of art history after Asoka is marked by a culmination during the first century B.C., to which the famous sculptured gates at Sanchi have been assigned, by a further rise of Buddhist art, leading into the transitional second century A.D., and so to the "Golden Age" of the third and fourth centuries. Then the emphasis gradually changes back from Buddhist to Brahmanic ideology, the seventh century marking the beginnings of the period sometimes known as the Hindu Rebirth.

The specialist in Indian art history divides this stream into almost innumerable currents and schools—which, as a series, can only bewilder the art lover coming in search of enjoyment. The Andhra development of the second century, distinguished particularly by the reliefs at Amaravati, should perhaps be mentioned by name even in the briefest review, since some authorities mark it as a point of final mastery. It is characterized by a special concession to realism and a sophistication not again attained.

The following "Golden Age" is known as the Gupta, and there is in it a partial return toward restraint, formalism, and tranquillity. Of the following early medieval period the famous sculptures at Mamallapuram are the most notable. They are in direct descent from the Gupta type, although a product of a provincial or collateral school and they deal with Vedic rather than Buddhist legendry. From the ninth century on, the Hindu spirit prevailed, and sculpture became hard and linear, and finally stereotyped.

Up to the second century A D the figure of Buddha had not been permitted in representation. A symbol had always served, for there is a prohibition against images implied in the impersonality of Gautama's philosophy. But once the image had been accepted, as deity or guide to the seeker, the two main currents of sculptural practice—producing on the one hand the single or dominating reposeful figure, on the other the profuse, many-figured decorative reliefs—existed side by side. In the latter, Vedic subjects yield to Buddhist, then the story-elements are very mixed. Finally Hinduism has again absorbed Buddhism, and the Buddhist legendry merely illustrates as well as others the Brahmanic principles. The single-figure iconography, however, then tends away to representations of Siva, Vishnu, Parvati, and others of the new gallery of gods.

Here there enters that rigid symbolism which is so typical of the Hindu medieval imaging. Every attitude, every garment fold, every added object, has its second meaning, and its exact form is prescribed. Sculpture becomes linear, intellectual, and ultimately uncreative. There is, however—the illustrations bear witness to this—a special sort of decorative charm in the finer examples, restrained and conventional but subtly rhythmic.

The architecture of early India has so generally disappeared that little more than conjecture about it is possible. The oldest surviving monuments are the Buddhist *stupas* or reliquaries. They are admirably simple in general form: a circular mound with flattened top, set on a terraced base. The decorative effectiveness lies chiefly in the carved balustrades, but four richly ornamented gateways are spaced at equal intervals outside the foundation terrace.

After them came those bewilderingly decorated cave-buildings, illogical as architecture, but eloquent of pamstaking devotion. Although the "structure" was chiselled out of solid stone, not built up piece by piece, the unimaginative builders have copied traditional masonry architecture. Columns are carved with bases, capitals, and architraves just as if all these had been assembled from separately shaped blocks of stone. Beyond the masonry elements, in turn, are members and idioms of a still earlier type of construction in wood. The instance may remind one that the mind of India has been controlled by tradition beyond that of any other surviving nation.

What the free-standing temples of the earlier periods may have been is conjectured from the remote evidence of the cave-temple copies. The oldest surviving temples in the open are of a type so overloaded that they evoke



*Standing Buddha* Bronze, Gupta period  
[Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

from the Western observer the sort of surprise and, usually, distaste voiced by Philipps

The illogic of the building and the obscuration of structure under the writhing garment of sculpture seem to remove early Hindu architecture from consideration with significant developments elsewhere. This changed when the Moslems invaded the country, bringing in the rich but controlled Islamic decorativeness, but up to the time of the conquest in the ninth century, there were no monuments even remotely approaching in beauty and restraint the Indian-Moslem Taj Mahal

In India painting has not been one of the supreme arts. At no time, apparently, did it assume the comparative importance it had in China in the T'ang and Sung periods, or in Western European countries from the time of the early Renaissance. The surviving Indian works are of two sorts mainly: the mural art of the golden era of Buddhism, and the independent painting, miniature in its dimensions and its delicate virtues, which came to this land with the Moslem conquerors, known as Indo-Persian painting. The latter, in its alien spirit and in its late date, belongs to a later chapter. The frescoes alone deserve mention beside Indian sculpture—which is, essentially, *the* Hindu art.

In the caves at Ajanta exists the most famous surviving body of Indian murals. References in literature indicate that the art had roots reaching back as far as three or four centuries before Christ. There are even fragmentary frescoes attributed to artists of the second or at latest the first century B.C. At Ajanta the series of wall pictures, found in sixteen of twenty-nine contiguous cave-buildings which had been used as monastic quarters and chapels, gives evidence of having been painted at intervals over a period of six centuries from about A.D. 50. The oldest have affinity with the sculptures of the time of the Sanchi gates, and there are middle-period figures which suggest a Hellenic influence of the sort felt in the Gandhara statues, but the greater proportion are assigned to the sixth and seventh centuries.

In these the typical Indian method is found—a method less tonal than linear, of a sort to be placed midway between drawing and painting. The artists, working on a damp plaster ground, relied very much upon outlines, filled the broader areas with colour washes, and finished off with draughtsman's detail. Light and shade were used arbitrarily. The chief virtues are those already noted in connexion with Indian sculpture: vigorous design, a highly rhythmical compositional sense, and rich decorative patterning. The





*Dancing Siva* Bronze, 16th century  
 [Courtesy William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City]

subjects are almost uniformly from Buddhist legendry. In dimensions the compositions range from those easel-size to wall-pictures twenty feet in width.

There are on the walls of the cave galleries at Sigiriya in Ceylon frescoes not dissimilar in technique and method. They too illustrate how the distinctive Indian fullness and grace spread over from the typical art of sculpture



*Standing Rama. Bronze, 12th century*  
 [Courtesy Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University]

to the less practised art of painting. That the methods and subject-matter of Indian Buddhist mural art were carried with the religion of Buddha into China, has already been noted. How far Persian practice influenced both developments is still a matter of speculation.

On the northwest borderland of India, near Afghanistan, there grew up a hybrid art which has claimed more of the world's attention than its merits strictly warrant. At Gandhara the Greeks established an outpost after Alex-

ander's push into Northern India. When the tide of Buddhist faith flowed into this borderland and met the cultural stream from the West, there arose a sculptural art in which the Indian elements were obviously modified by Hellenistic naturalism.

The relics are not very important æsthetically. Some are like a blending of heavy Pergamene work and routine Indian iconography. The chief interest in the development lies in the probability that its emergence may have marked a main meeting-point of routes to China and Western Asia, that here was a gateway of that flood of Buddhist doctrine and art that swept out of India and into China, to change for ever the course of Far Eastern religion and art. The Hellenists in their hey-day were quick to claim that the best strains of both Indian and Chinese sculpture were introduced from the classic Western world at this point. But later opinion marks the Hellenistic influence as a passing one and very limited. The one unanswerable argument is that late Greek sculpture and all Roman sculpture are formally inferior to the products of India and China. Gandhara affords an interesting episode in that pageant of crossing and recrossing national currents which preclude racial purity in most of the world's art products, it serves as a reminder of the continual and universal give-and-take of cultures.

The Indian civilization of the Golden Age pushed out until it embraced extensive lands to the southeastward. In Ceylon the development of art so closely parallels that on the mainland that it may be considered a part of the Indian achievement. And indeed some of the best-known sculpture in the Indian Buddhist tradition, and of the Hindu Rebirth, is in the contribution of this island. But in the less directly affected regions now included in French Indo-China and in Indonesia, particularly Java, the Indian religions, language, and arts penetrated cultures of peoples of another racial origin—chiefly Chinese—and resulted in distinctive and important art developments.

The civilizations that thus took over the Sanskrit language and the Hindu-Buddhist sculpture and architecture flourished in general from the ninth to the thirteenth century. One of the main influences was the tide of Buddhism, which long before had swept over Tibet and China, and then into Japan. But the independent nature of the Malayan and Indonesian manifestation is indicated in the parallel growth of Brahmanic and Buddhist cultures. To this day both faiths exist in Bali.



*Asolok testara* Bronze, Ceylon 8th century  
 [Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

In short the Javan and Cambodian and Champan cultures—to name the three artistically most important—took on the general form of Hindu civilization but modified the outlines and emphasis in accordance with national character. At Boro Budur in Central Java is an eighth-century temple or sanctuary which might be put down by the inexperienced eye as an unalloyed masterpiece of Indian architecture. Here are the monumental spread the terraced masses the intricately indented and carved forms the profusion of



*Head of Buddha Stone, Boro Budur*  
*[Courtesy C T Loo & Company]*

ornamentation, there are no fewer than four hundred and thirty-six niches for larger statues (as counted by Grousset), and the stupa-form that crowns the structure is echoed in seventy-two smaller reliquary-mounds on one of the several terraces. And yet the composition is, on close study, comparatively simplified, the logic of building less obscured. From this it may be inferred that the colonial Indian states yielded little to the mother country in the matters of architectural profusion and magnificence, yet there is that native note of logic and restraint.

The sculpture at Boro Budur is highly distinctive, it deserves to be known as one of the world's shrines of the art. The massive Buddha figures are distinguished by the grave, tranquil impressiveness that lies at the heart of the one great division of Oriental imaging, with an admirable plastic simplicity and largeness, and a spacious impersonality of meaning. The relief panels, in contrast, are warmly human, profusely embroidered, and seductively grace-



Relief panel, Boro Budur

[M. P.-Verneuil: *Les Temples de la Période Classique Indo-Javanaise*]

ful. At times the artists descend to what would be in other hands dryly literal content. They surround the dominant figure-groups with trees and flowers, houses and ships, pots and umbrellas, in a documented narrative which should spell prosaic illustration. But the natural objects are, in general, so conventionalized and so subordinated that they become ornamental accompaniment and enriching display.

The single heads and single figures when detached from the rhythmic context are likely to have extraordinary plastic aliveness and fullness. The bodies are in the voluptuous Hindu tradition. The treatment is caressing, rounded, tender. The figure-groups—and these are the heart of the panel-compositions—are handled with consummate decorative artistry. As pattern they have just the right regularity with just the needed variation. The volumes swell and return and swell again. The linear melodies weave in and out and then repeat. The panel as a whole vibrates with movement—yet never



Relief, detail, Boro Budur

[M P -Verneuil *Les Temples de la Période Classique Indo-Javanaise*]

loses its poise. The abstract unity embracing this rich contrapuntal interplay is complete, confined, sustained.

There survive at Boro Budur sixteen hundred of these sculptured murals. They are story-scenes of the life of Buddha. It is typical of Indian and of Buddhist art that the sculptors permitted themselves to delight in dancing girls and musicians and lovers no less than in Bodhisattvas and pious pilgrims, in fruits and flowers no less than in symbols of withdrawal and godliness.

If there is a lush sensuousness, a voluptuous grace, over it all—so that the luxuriant fullness in the feminine forms extends to horses and elephants as well as dancing girls and temptresses, and the swelling soft curve of breast and hip is equally caught in lotus petal and fruit—it is part of the sustained loveliness, at once youthful and mature, of Indian stylization. It marks thus as a special sort, a limited kind of sculpture. Within its limits it is gorgeous and unsurpassed.

Twice again the mature Indian sculpture of the Gupta period was to flower in the Eastern Indianized lands in Cambodia and in Champa, both parts of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. The Khmer civilization of Cambodia has left two architectural monuments to testify to the magnificence of its culture, the temple of Angkor Vat and the palace of Angkor Tom, both of a size worthy to memorialize what was once a mighty empire. The building at Angkor Vat, indeed, is the largest in the world.

The Khmers and the Champan people alike had taken their court language and their religions from India, and the derivation of their art from that of the mother land is evident. But like the Javanese they modified the way of statement, the sculptural language, so that their works survive in their own right, as something separate. Someone has summed up the content of their art by saying that they immortalized their own land along with the Hindu heaven, and there is a like conjunction of native and derived sculptural idioms.

The great Cambodian wall-reliefs, for instance, could generically belong to no other major development than the Indian. Yet the native taste and inheritance have laid a restraining hand on the swelling forms and the luxuriant patterning. Wall sense is better preserved, an almost curtain-like effect is achieved. The figures are no less profusely multiplied than in India and Java, but they are kept flatter to the stone. The decorative background is more evenly traced over with trees, architectural motives, or geometric floriation. Nonetheless the sense of movement is exceptional, the main narrative drive is kept clear. The miles of such murals include an astonishingly varied pageant of legendary and local life, of religion and history, of battles and hunting and luxurious indulgences, of kings and deities and elephants and snakes, of marriages and funerals and picnics.

There are, later, deeper-cut works more showily elaborated. They are a return to that Indian style that might almost be termed Oriental baroque, bordering on the flamboyant and grotesque. There are also, at Angkor Vat, high-relief bits that are endlessly engaging even while amusingly light in spirit. Such is the extraordinary frieze of dancing girls which has been so often reproduced in the Western travel books—and merits a page here, as in all inclusive histories of art.

The most profound Khmer achievement is in a distinctive type of head, particularly in representations of the Buddha. There is native as well as Hindu foreshadowing of this iconographic art even a well recognized "pre-





*Frieze of the Dancers Detail Angkor Vat*  
 [Girandon photo, courtesy Editions Tel]

Angkorian style," characterized by a simplicity and summariness of sculptural statement that have more affinity with China than with India. But by the beginning of the tenth century the Hindu tide ran strong—there are legends of the marriage of local princesses or local goddesses to the Brahmins from the north—and thenceforward what is known as the Cambodian type-figure is established. The sculptural culmination came three centuries later, coincident with the building of Angkor Vat.

Seldom has a type statue been so often repeated in stone with the essential virtue held intact. Every Western museum now has its Cambodian Buddha head, and generally the fragment ranks high even among selected world masterpieces. Facial expression and plastic means seldom are so beautifully co-ordinated; the spiritual implications and abstract harmony so fused. The face is gentle, relaxed, eloquent of inner tranquillity. Compassion, understanding, release, are implicit. The purely sculptural elements are perfectly shaped to support and confirm the gentle power, the spiritual calm. The massiveness of the volume is retained, but is qualified by the formal tracery of



*Head of Buddha Cambodia*  
 [Courtesy C. T. Loo & Company]

the hair, is tenderly varied in the reticent modelling of the features. This majesty and dignity of the stone, this quiet mastery of plastic orchestration, perfectly externalizes the Buddhist mystic identification with the divine, and diffuses in its own way the inner light.

We may believe, as Grousset suggests, that sculpture in India never quite arrived at such quiet dignity, such comprehending humanism, because there Buddhism insufficiently overcame the Brahmanic impersonality and intellectualism. In any case, Khmer art here touches a summit. In a sense it is more Hindu than the Hindu achievement. At least by lifting that achievement to more humanly comprehensible terms, it may stand to the world as a supreme revelation of the art that is designed to minister to the soul. It is mystic-human art at its best. It evokes, reveals, tranquilizes, illumines, even while affording the plastic experience purely and intensely.



*Standing Buddha* Pre-Khmer period 7th or 8th century Cambodia  
 [Courtesy William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City]

To the east of Cambodia the Champan people established a kingdom in the early centuries of the Christian era. Although bitter rivals of the Khmers, they similarly absorbed the main features of Indian civilization. And their art is similarly born of a conjunction of native and Brahmin elements.

But Champan sculpture, although paralleling the Gupta achievement closely at certain periods, departed farther than the Khmer in two directions. First, the Indian figure is simplified and synthesized, at times with a beautiful directness (Witness the *Pari ati* now in the museum at Touraine). Then the Champan genius struck off into a style heavily massive, primitively squared. It is still unrealistic, strictly formalized, but the stylistic affinities can be thought of only as early Chinese or in the other time direction, as Polynesian. There seem to be unmistakable surface likeness and an affinity in sculptural method to the Mayan.

But many observers will prefer, in the gallery of Champan art, the more "normal" and animated dancing girls from the relief murals at Tra-Kieu. Here one returns to the main Indian tradition. The seductive figures, at once sinuous and voluptuous, the strict formalization without too great strain on natural truth, the striking sense of movement within plastic repose, the melody and the choral enrichment—all these qualities are picked up, epitomized. They afford a text for fitting concluding words about Indian art. This art never lost the feeling of delight in the sense-world, was ever mellifluous and rhythmical and abundant. The sensuous loveliness could be almost muted, as was fitting, when the artist entered the chambers of spiritual meditation, when he came soberly into the presence of the Buddha. But almost miraculously the balance is held. The soul and the senses are addressed in one evocative harmony, in one sculptural creation.



*Dancer and Musician* Figures on a pedestal stone, about 7th century  
 Tourane Museum [H. Parmentier. *Les Sculptures Châmes au Musée de Touraine*]

*Byzantium: The Marriage of East and West*

ONCE only did the Orient come to Europe bringing its gifts of gorgeous colour, rich non-representational patterning, and formal stylization. Once only the Romanized Western world gave up something of its logic and realism, welcomed the sensuous and mystic arts of the East, accepting for a time an abundant Greco-Asiatic garment for its new born and hardly understood Christianity.

Byzantine art is Oriental Christian art. Spiritually and artistically, classic Rome had died. Despite the emphasis laid by later history upon Rome's part in the birth and development of organized Christianity—with dramatic stories of martyred heroes in the amphitheatres and fanatic devotion in the catacombs—it is to be remembered first that Christ and the Jews were Asiatic. The background of Christian legendry, ritual, and art is Syrian, Armenian, Persian, and even Egyptian, before it is Roman. It was not a mere wave of influence that carried the colour and formalism of the East over a crystallized Western culture, rather the first great Christian culture, the Byzantine, was essentially Oriental in texture, in origin.<sup>1</sup> In the end it is, geographically, more an art of Europe than of Asia, but its beginnings and its style-marks are Asiatic.

The common and convenient metaphor for Byzantine art is that it represents the marriage of East and West, but one must remember that the inter-

<sup>1</sup> For the general reader and observer this broad use of the term Byzantine art seems more satisfactory than any of the limited applications advocated by groups of specialists. Some critics would exclude the earlier formative manifestations even up to the ninth-century flowering, separating them as merely early Christian. Others would date the development strictly from the designation of Byzantium as the Christian capital in A.D. 330. It seems more useful to extend the meaning to cover the full range of manifestations within the spirit of the new culture, with due recognition of its two foundations in the Christian faith and in Greco-Asiatic art traditions, and of its distinctive differences from Greek-Roman and earlier Oriental cultures.

mixture of blood and culture had been continuing for long ages. Such decorative art as Rome had was produced largely by imported artists. Even Alexandria, from which Rome drew so heavily, had lost its pure Hellenistic character, had absorbed Egyptian and Near-Eastern elements.

When, therefore, a Roman Christian emperor chose the Greek colonial town of Byzantium on the Bosphorus for his new capital, in the year 330, he thereby gave a name to an art already distinctive, and did not there and then merge—as the schoolbooks sometimes facetiously imply—the arts of Rome and the arts of the pagan East. Rather there had already developed, on the Eastern shore of the Mediterranean and beyond, where Christianity already had reached a certain maturity, a culture fertilized by immemorially old artistic traditions. The immediate sources were, most notably, Coptic Egypt—where so many Christian customs and symbols originated, including the first monastic orders, and the official iconography—Syria with its crossed Hebrew, colonial Greek, and Mesopotamian influences, and Persia.

It is illuminating to remember, too, that this Oriental Christian art is half-brother to the Arabian-Moslem, which will start its triumphant march across the Middle East and creep along the lower shore of the Mediterranean even into Spanish Europe, before Byzantine history is half done. Though Christian Europe will "cleanse itself" of the gorgeous art of the East after a struggle spanning eight centuries, returning with the Renaissance to Roman realism and scientific rationalism, it tastes this once the sensuousness and mysticism of the Asia that gave it a Christ (it will rationalize Him also, almost squeezing out the spiritual mysticism of Jesus). It enjoyed for a space the richer beauty of an art related in spirit to the Persian, the Hindu, the Chinese.

The place of the Byzantine culture in the world stream of art is not easily marked off in terms of geographic boundaries or stylistic independence. In duration it extended from the second or third century A.D. to the thirteenth, a span very long in comparison with the Greek, the Roman, or the later European stylistic periods. It lived on in modified expressions, even in pure form in a minor art, till the twentieth century.

It was geographically decentralized in the earliest centuries, was centralized in Byzantium by decree in 330, and in fact from about 500 on, sent its missionaries and its products in a more or less continuous stream through all its history, to the Western Christian lands, resulting in one notable flowering at Ravenna in the sixth century, and one at Venice and in Sicily in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It crept into upper Italy and France, and remained to

enrich the otherwise stark Romanesque style. Although Giotto and the Sieneſe ſignalled its departure from Weſtern Chriſtendom, it lived on in the Balkan countries and in Ruſſia. The laſt phase of it perſiſted in Ruſſia and Greece down to the opening of the twentieth century, in the icons of the Orthodox Church and in the traditional Ruſſian religious architecture.

Styliſtically it is the moſt difficult of the great world art-cultures to define and bound. It grew out of other arts—may be conſidered almoſt mongrel in ancestry—and it mixed with ſo many croſſing currents, racial, national, and religious, that what is to one authority its pureſt iſſue is to another a baſtard product. The two certainties are the Chriſtian purpoſe of it and the Oriental ſurface expreſſion. Its monumental architecture reſulted almoſt excluſively in churches, the ſubject-matter of its moſaics, illuminations, and ſculptures is almoſt unfailingly taken from Chriſtian Bible ſtories and imagery. But over the churches, the picturing, and the images alike there was the ſumptuous glow of the Eaſt, and church ſtructure and repreſentational figure are hardly ſo ſignificant as the non-repreſentational, ornamental aſpect of it. In Byzantium's Santa Sophia, in Greek churches and monaſteries, in Ravenna and Palermo and Venice, in Serbia and Ruſſia, there is the colour and abundant patterning of Arabia and Persia and Cathay.

Thus Byzantine art regathered the creative forces of expreſſion in what had been the Hellenized, then the Romanized Eaſtern Mediterranean world. It turned back the enfeebled classic current. It crystallized a ſtyle in the glowing, formalized, abundant way of Asia.

The land of the Pharaohs, ſo cloſe to Paleſtine, is woven into the background of Old Teſtament hiſtory. But European chroniclers have ſometimes been leſs than fair in their accounts of the large part played by Egyptian Chriſtians in the development of the Church polity and the Chriſtian culture. The Egyptians introduced firſt an individual aſceticism, then the ſystem of monaſteries and monaſtic orders which was to be a feature of Near-Eaſtern and European religious life through all Chriſtian hiſtory, which was, moreover, to nurſe the more fragile arts through the centuries of intellectual darkneſs and ſocial chaos in Europe.

The Egyptian Chriſtians are known as Copts. They and the preſent-day Abyssinians were branches that were later cut off from the Holy Roman Empire, over one heresy or another. Their ideas and their imagery were ultimately adjudged unorthodox and pagan, which merely means that ſome

other accretions to the simple gospel and parables of Jesus had been successfully established as orthodox by other racial or sectarian groups

It is an open question whether characteristic Coptic art is not as much a development matured after the division was made from the main church as a growth within the united establishment. But Coptic art and the Syrian that leads more directly to the gates of Byzantium have unmistakable affinity, and the Egyptian expression may have held the earlier determining impulse.

In any case, in those decades of the third century when Egypt was yielding up numerous Christian martyrs under official Roman persecution, when the earliest monasteries were building, when Alexandria was a centre of theological discussion, dissension, and creed-fixing, there grew up a Coptic art distinctively beautiful. It was Oriental in its abundant ornamentation, its vigour, and its grudging concession to representationalism. There are catacomb paintings not dissimilar to those in Rome—it is supposed that Alexandrian artists were among the persecuted Christians who decorated the underground burial and meeting places of the Italian cities. But more significant are the frescoes, particularly those in a monastery at Sakkara. For here one can see a blending of Hellenistic picturing with some of the old Egyptian formalism as well as a strain of full-patterned decorativeness out of the Middle or Far East—a blending of Greek, African, and Asiatic idioms in service of a God destined to sway the destiny of Europe.

The flattened compositions, the stiff iconography, the posteresque largeness, and the full colour—these are values common to transitional Roman church murals, Coptic monastery frescoes, and early Byzantine mosaics found in cities on the Syrian coast. But the Egyptian paintings are perhaps the most richly eye-filling, more decoratively built up with patterned areas and intertwining linear motives—in the Eastern manner.

If the painted murals are historically more important, it is the Coptic textiles and decorative sculpture that are for the casual observer, the more distinctive and enjoyable mementoes out of Christian Egypt. The patterned stuffs are among the most engaging and opulent in the world's whole range of designs upon cloth. Outside that development of which they are an integral part—it is not easy to distinguish Coptic from Syrian and Persian relics of the time—there are only the woven stuffs of the Chinese and Japanese, and the textiles of the Peruvians, to dispute supremacy. There is, one notes, a somewhat similar later expression, widely diffused, and found even today in scattered peasant cultures of Europe. They may perhaps be marked as in-





Coptic textiles [Volbach and Kuchinel

*Late Antique, Coptic and Islamic Textiles of Egypt* Courtesy E. Weyhe]

direct inheritors of Byzantine crafts traditions, or as survivals of parallel cultures starting from the Iranian and Scythian sources that gave character through Persian intermediaries to the Byzantine.

Here are long ribbon fabrics with intricately interlaced, nearly geometric all-over patterning, or richly bordered open fields sprinkled with perfect formalizations of flower sprays or stags or birds, or oftener, panels geometrically divided, the parts filled with conventionalized monsters, trees, and men. The animals—they seem direct descendants of the Scythian ones, in their vigour and decorativeness—fill out the spaces with a sort of exuberant orna-



*Nereids Sporting in Water* Coptic wool tapestry fragment 5th century  
 Dumbarton Oaks Collection Wash DC

mental fullness. They are replete with movement but perfectly anchored within the design. They leap and pull and prance yet are flat to the field. No more intense and dynamic decorative art is known. The colours are at once delightfully harmonious and gorgeous. More will be seen of Coptic art in our museums as Egyptian explorations go forward.

For the beginnings of Christian architecture it is necessary to seek in Syria and Persia. The structure from which the elaborated Byzantine church was to grow was probably a simple square hall domed over with side buildings buttressing against the thrust of the dome. Its origin seems to be in Persia with the possibility of prototypes in Armenia, although scholars disagree bitterly about the evidence. The finest early examples have recently come to light in Syria. In all these regions Christian communities were worshipping in churches while their Roman brothers were still meeting clandestinely underground.

Eastern dome and Eastern vault therefore became the first standard structural elements for Christian houses of worship. The Mesopotamian barrel vault played a large part in architectural evolution. Even into the twentieth century the Orthodox Church has held to the original cruciform construction.



*Seated Divinity with Gems and Flowers Coptic wool tapestry, 5th century  
Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, D C*

with four barrel-vaulted sections pushed out from the domed crossing

The early Christian churches in Syria and Egypt and Mesopotamia, however, took a wide variety of forms, a few that come within the definition of basilica, but most in varying interpretations of the Eastern idioms. Antioch remained closer to Rome and Alexandria in spirit, a fact also attested by its floor mosaics. In other cities the vaulted construction with domes crystallized in the system that made possible the great monument of Santa Sophia at Byzantium. In incidental decorative features also the Syrian churches are typical with blind arcades and occasional inset patterned panels. The column is no longer a main structural element as in Greek and Roman building. Already a long step has been taken toward those unbroken walls on which the Byzantine mosaics will be spread.

The Syrian monuments of early Christian architecture are not intrinsically of exceptional merit. But they are often pleasingly rhythmic, even majestic. In Istanbul or Athens, in Russia or Spain, you will find churches in the line of descent from these Syrian-Persian vaulted structures. And through the Byzantine the influence will come to Western Europe, shaping certain salient features of the Romanesque.

The framework of the new Christian culture was thus being constructed in the East while the West was officially proscribing and persecuting the followers of Christ. Then suddenly an emperor, with true Roman shrewdness, recognized that the only possible way to union lay in the Christian faith and went over to the persecuted. He legalized the Church, and laid the foundations of a new Holy Roman Empire over the territory upon which his old and very unholy one had been progressively going to pieces.

It was in 330 that Constantine transferred the capital to Byzantium, then an unimportant Greek town at the easternmost point of Southern Europe, whence one could look across the straits to Asia. It was a strategic crossroads of trade and tourist routes, and a natural centre for an empire designed to amalgamate the Eastern and Western worlds. As a matter of fact most of the West was soon to be lost, taken over by the Northern barbarians. There will remain an Eastern Roman Empire, at a time when Rome itself is surrendered to Goths and Vandals. This Eastern Empire really is Roman only in its name and its imperial ideology. Its language already is substantially Greek, its arts largely Asiatic.

In Rome and Italy, until the legalizing of the new religion, there necessarily had been no Christian architecture. The catacombs are symbolic. Sometimes a wealthy convert opened a room or hall in his palace for congregations. When Constantine signed his edict, the ban was lifted, and the need for great meeting halls arose. It was then that the basilica, which had been the Roman law court and trading centre, was hastily adapted to the purpose.

The old temples were useless, were too cramped. Christianity was the first great religion demanding covered space for large congregations of worshippers. The basilica seemed made to order. The main hall became the nave (symbolically a ship, or *navis*, bearing the believers to the haven of salvation). The apse needed only a table altar to remind the worshippers of the sarcophagus-top which had served for the ceremony of the mass in the catacombs, to these, choir, pulpits, and other features were presently added.



*The Miracle at Cana Coptic ivory 6th century  
[Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum]*

This basilica form was copied in many a distant Roman colony. It was taken by Helena, mother of Constantine, to Palestine, where she caused to be built in classic fashion the Church of the Nativity over the spot at which Jesus had been born. But at Jerusalem the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was on the combined plan of basilica and Eastern domed church, and throughout the countries bordering on the Holy Land the dome and vault church became the commoner model.

Rome had had too what is sometimes termed early Christian painting. The catacomb frescoes are little more than amateurish reflections of the

rather dull sort of thing to be seen still at Pompeii, interesting as illustration or historical document. Toward the end of the period of persecutions, in the third and early fourth centuries, there are occasional essays more ambitious and not without artistic merit. In general it may be said that all this tag-end Roman art was dropped from the luggage of Constantine the Great while he was on his way from Rome to Byzantium. What he brought to the new capital was a name—the city was to be known as Constantinople, until the conquering Moslems gave it another eleven centuries later—and an imperial scale of planning, both political and material.

Constantine personally led in the work of organizing Christendom in one polity, before the mortar of his new capital was dry. At the Council of Nicæa in 325 he as Emperor, although not yet baptized, presided over discussions that fixed the official creed of Christianity. There and then he pushed the *Holy Roman Empire* onto the world stage. Soon after he lost some minor churches that had too firmly made up their minds about the nature of God, the divinity of Christ, and ritualistic matters. But he had made the Empire an entity, had united Christians from now beleaguered Rome to Palestine and Persia. He had officially sanctioned the strongest elements and most popular practices out of Eastern and Western pioneer churches: the priesthood, a limited canonization of saints, celebration of blood rites. He also had introduced into the Church plan the ideas of imperialism, autocracy, and intolerance.

It was left to a successor of two centuries later, Justinian, to deck Constantinople out in a splendour fit for the wealthiest city in the world, which had become also an imperial capital. He built Santa Sophia, that incredibly rich monument of Byzantine architecture and decoration, as one unit in a Capitol plan. He made the city a centre of manufacture and export of those works of art that were to go forth and leaven the sluggish expression of reawakened Europe. Perhaps his empress, Theodora, had something to do with his patronage of the arts and crafts, she had in youth been an artist of a sort, an actress.

It is just as well to pick up the story of actual art products here at the flood, when Santa Sophia was opened, in 537. The structure, at present a Turkish mosque, has for ages been considered the outstanding monument of the Byzantine building art. It is somewhat less than typical in the matter of its display of true Eastern mosaic-work—its walls being more than typically broken up by arcades, galleries, and windows—but it is pre-eminent in its



*Santa Sophia. Istanbul, 6th century, with later minarets*

largeness, its breathtaking engineering and its sumptuous variety of effect. In its own day it was rivalled by the near-by Church of the Holy Apostles, an equally luxuriant expression but on a simpler constructive system that could be, and was, widely copied in Europe. These two buildings, moreover, should be surrounded in the imagination with the complex of regal palaces, colonnades, baths, galleries, administrative halls, gardens, and other appanages of imperial grandeur which once covered the palace grounds from the present church to the sea.

Santa Sophia somewhat belies its name which means primarily Church of the Holy Wisdom. It is rather a dream come true for a surfeited emperor than a sober expression of spiritual wisdom. It constitutes a gesture to God in the manner of Roman wealth and display, a gesture made at a time when the artistic riches of the East were ready to the builders' hands. The meditative, quietly adorational spirit of Christian worship is somewhat missed. But it turns out to be every man's opportunity to feast upon munificent visual al-

lurements, poured out in service to Him Whom countless generations have called King of Kings

More than most Eastern churches, Santa Sophia capitalizes on its structural features, even dramatizes its engineering. The immense domed space—it is, as usual in the old Orient, the interior alone that is eloquent—seems to rest under a floating shell. To this the galleries and arches seem to lift effortlessly. The structure is, as a matter of fact, a *tour de force* of vaulting.

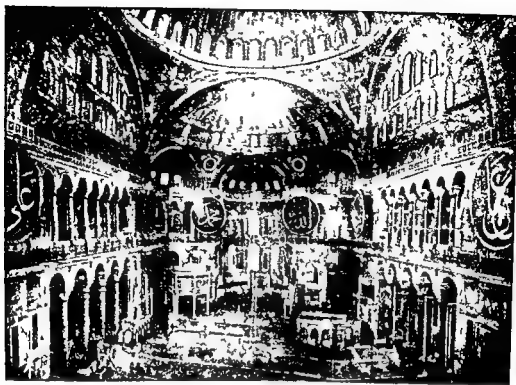
Santa Sophia is essentially the early Christian cruciform church raised to titanic proportions. There is the same central dome over a square. There are the same arms in four directions, supporting the outward thrust. The same vaulting is over all.

It is worth studying out, even in photographs, the way in which the dome of Santa Sophia is carried, its drum resting on four curvilinear triangles, of a form known as pendentives, the lower points of these resting on the four piers at the corners of the central square. At all four sides such a domed structure must be buttressed. Here two of the arms are apse-like, the main hall extending under half-domes, which themselves rest upon a further complex of apses. At each of the other two sides the pendentives form a windowed arch, below, the wall is pierced by superposed arcades, beyond which are galleries, in the buttressing side-buildings. This illustrates perfectly, with instructive variations, that Eastern system of dome-and-vault building which is the very antithesis of Classic post-and-lintel construction.

But if the engineering is stupendously impressive, reducing massive and weighty elements to a seeming lightness, it is the decorative profusion that the more certainly evokes amazement and wonder. It is dazzling, and inconceivably intricate, in view of the simple general impression. It has not the unity of colour and gold and fire of some minor Byzantine monuments. It is rather the imperial capital of Christendom frankly displaying its wealth in the large, ostentatiously spreading a feast for the eye.

And indeed the pagan temples of the entire Near East were sacked to provide Byzantium with these porphyry columns and the *verde antico* and exquisitely var-coloured marbles. Procopius, in his chronicles of the court of Justinian, exclaimed: 'Who can tell of the splendour of the columns and marbles with which the church is adorned? One would think that one had come upon a flowery meadow, one marvels at the purple hues of some and the green of others.' The same observer remarks: 'It is impossible to describe with accuracy the treasures of gold and silver plate and gems which





*Santa Sophia. Interior*

the Emperor has presented to the church " And he goes on to tell that the revenues of three hundred estates were necessary for the mere routine upkeep of the church. He also names the architects, Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus. But Procopius gives the emperor prime credit by selecting "among the men of this profession those most capable of interpreting his lofty conception," he "succeeded in making this church a work of incomparable beauty." Justinian is reported to have said when he entered Santa Sophia on the day of dedication "Glory to God, who has found me worthy to complete so great a work—and to excel thee, O Solomon!"

The decorative profusion is over a good deal of the space on interior walls, columns, friezes, and doors. It is possible to pick out panels, capitals, and bandings that illustrate the Oriental artist's perfect mastery of all-over ornament and space-filling pattern. A single capital may serve to suggest the opulence of the whole.

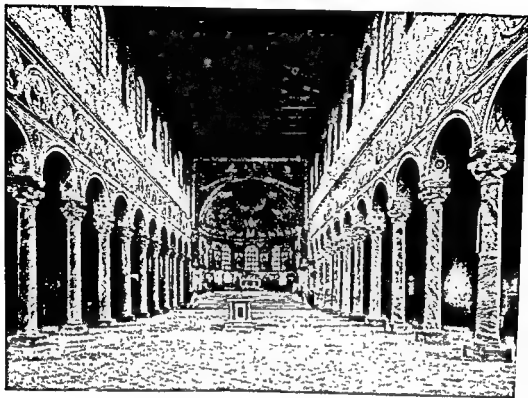
There is however, one cardinal principle of Byzantine architecture which is

but poorly illustrated in Santa Sophia. The Eastern subordination of individual structural members is, at its best, as seen elsewhere, followed by a decorative gain. In churches from Persia and Greece to Ravenna and Palermo there is a frank suppression of incidental columns, cornices, and edgings, to clear the walls for surface decoration. The declared logic of structure gives way before a logic of the unity of decorative lining. To the classicist and the intellectualist, this is deplorable. To the lover of glowing garments of colour and rhythmic patterning, it is more than justifiable. It led to one of the most glorious manifestations of colourfulness in the whole of world architecture. Within certain Byzantine churches one may lose oneself in sensuous delight.

The better examples—seldom surviving without damage or restoration—are in the West. In the Tomb of Galla Placidia at Ravenna and in parts of the glorious churches there, in the chapels at Palermo and in bits that may be separated by the eye in the Greek monasteries, in Monreale outside Palermo, and in St Mark's at Venice—in all these one can feel the smoothing of the surfaces to receive the all-important coating of mosaic and flat patterning. Arch flows into wall, pendentive leads into drum, drum into cupola, with least possible interruption to the eye. The continuous rich lining is the protected feature.

This preparation of the interior surfaces of the building to take easily and effectively a coating of gold and colour and mural design is no longer uniformly condemned in the West as an illogical obscuring of structural truth. Rather, there is recognized a different logic, which accepts the mosaic as typically a lining material, thin, flexible, best seen in large areas, and sufficiently precious to warrant the shaping of engineering features to permit its most effective use. In the best manifestations the structural method will be less obscured than frankly shaped to the purpose, i.e., smoothed down, given a certain flowing unity.

The arches and vaults, to be sure, are there in outline. But they are softened rather than accented at the edges and corners, blunted at the junctures. The eye still sees the larger architectural forms, subconsciously is aware of the complex of weight-bearing elements, of thrust and strain and support, but it is satisfied because the designers have so frankly declared their decorative purpose, sheering the walls, eschewing columns and frames, moulding the structural body to receive the flowing garment. Mosaics added to buildings without this special preparation and declaration are, of course, utterly illogical and superficial. A certain rounding and smoothing of structure are



St. Apollinare in Classe. [Anderson photo]

presupposed. That is the reason why so much modern mosaic, merely an addition to architecture, is unsatisfactory.

At Ravenna on the east coast of Italy the tomb of Galla Placidia is a nearly perfect miniature example of Byzantine interior architecture and decoration. Built in the mid-fifth century, it antedates Santa Sophia; it is indeed the earliest of surviving full-mosaicked structures. It is perfectly the cruciform building, with dome at centre—though the exterior shell over the dome is square, which might be Eastern, or due to Lombard influence at some time of restoration. Inside, above a marble wainscoting, every inch is lined with mosaics. Some parts are pictorial, some traced with abstract or floral ornament. The ceiling is studded with stars in a field of blue and green. The effect as one goes from the barrenly rugged atmosphere of the brick exterior into this enchanting roomful of colour is indescribable. It is, fortunately, only one of the experiences of the exotic richness of Byzantine art possible within a few hours for the visitor to Ravenna.

How art came so richly to this malarious city in an East Italian swamp is a romantic story that cannot be told in any detail here. The malaria helped. For Ravenna was the refuge of those last emperors of the Western Roman Empire, who were harried by the Goths, Vandals, and Huns from the north. Rome lay exhausted, its wealth and its best blood drained away, its morality sunk to worse than barbarian level, its arts run out. Probably the heathen from the north were bringing a manliness and honesty and semi-primitive vigour that were necessary to the regeneration of the Latins. In any case, emperor after emperor had had to compromise with circumstances if not run away. Ravenna, a Venice-like island town, defended by water and swamps, was a natural haven. At the worst, too, a hard-pressed ruler and his court could embark there and shortly be in Constantinople under the protection of the brother-emperor who ruled the Eastern Roman Empire—though at about this time even Constantinople was forced to pay tribute to Attila the Hun.

Galla Placidia was the sister of Honorius, one of the emperors who had been, figuratively speaking, chased across Italy. Her gem-like tomb is the only surviving important relic of the first imperial period at Ravenna, when Honorius borrowed native Byzantine artists to decorate the new capital in rivalry with Constantinople. There are descriptions of magnificent churches of this fifth-century flowering, but the larger buildings have been destroyed. Of the second imperial period, however, of about the time of Justinian, there are several surpassing monuments. Ravenna had then, after going the sad way of all Italy, been reclaimed, this time by the Eastern Empire. An exarch or imperial governor had taken residence there, and engaged in extensive building enterprises. Two of the immense churches were constructed on the basilica plan, but were decorated in true Byzantine brilliancy. St. Apollinare Nuovo, and St. Apollinare in Classe, the latter outside the town, at what used to be the port. A third great church, St. Vitale, not only was decorated in the Eastern way, but was constructed in typical Byzantine fashion, around a central dome supported by a complex of arches and half-domes.

What gorgeous mosaics the imperial artists spread over all available walls may be guessed from the portions that have outwitted time and the destructive proclivities of man. Nowhere in the three churches is there the extravagant glitter of Santa Sophia, or the more unified brilliancy of the near-by mausoleum of Galla Placidia and the faraway churches of Palermo. The two basilicas, of course, in the nature of classic building, offer only

limited surfaces to the mosaicist, and St Vitale is more broken up structurally than the usual Eastern church—and has been despoiled, moreover, of most of its original decoration. Nevertheless, there are rewarding panels and friezes, and occasionally a complete undefiled apse.

In the basilica at Classe the apse and the wall above are adorned with a mosaic composition that sets forth its message with complete lucidity, but still remains superb decoration rather than picture. The composition is kept flat, the first requirement of mural design, and the whole has the aspect of rich patterning. Yet here are woven into one composition St Apollinare leading his flock, an emblematic representation of the transfiguration, a double procession of sheep going up from Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and a crowning representation of Christ and the four Evangelists. The figuring is as naïve and formal as that on the textiles of the East.

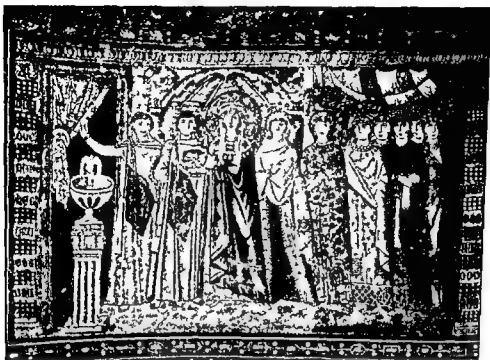
In St. Apollinare Nuovo it is the long figured friezes, running the length of the nave, that are most impressive. The saints and virgins and martyrs of the processions are conceived as befits an imperial court: they wear rich clothes and bear costly gifts. And the sumptuousness carries over into the mosaic technique.

In St Vitale the few independent picture-compositions are equally rich in effect, but more comment has been evoked by the fact that here the divinity claimed by secular rulers is made manifest. Not only is the Emperor Justinian set out with a halo, but the Empress Theodora wears one too—and very handsomely. Again the design is flat, the picturing unrealistic, and the decorative effect opulent and glittering.

Mosaic is an art wherein small pieces of stone are set in cement. The method makes exactness of drawing difficult, tends away from realism and the sort of linear niggling that had become standard with the Roman and late Greek painters. It encourages a flat formalized treatment, and by its resources of brilliant colour it perfectly played into the hand of the Oriental decorator intent upon sensuous richness and colourful glow as well as religious symbolism.

Beyond the colourfulness and tapestry-like effect there is noticeably combined an angularity of figure with a roundness of handling, due partly to the medium, partly to the bent of the Eastern mind toward formalization rather than imitation. The same carelessness of natural appearance, the same near-abstractness standing for the man represented, the same naïve disregard for background and shadows, are seen in the manuscript illuminations of the era.

The Byzantine mosaics afford a glowing pleasure unique in the history of



*The Empress Theodora and Her Retinue Mosaic St Vitale, Ravenna  
[Anderson photo]*

art. They touch the supreme point of achievement in this medium. They bring the lavish colour and sumptuous patterning of the Orient to Europe in a few surviving monuments from that day when a merging of the European and Asiatic worlds was dreamed over and fought for.

As in other fields the specialists have rigged Byzantine mosaic art with a full complement of periods, stylistic variations and regional influences. The Constantinopolitan manner, for instance, is traced in certain periods and phases, the early Syrian imagery in others. But these are nuances little calculated to aid one who is primarily seeking enjoyment in art.

The illuminations or miniatures in early Christian manuscripts are endlessly engaging. Here there is a considerable body of Hellenistic and transitional work before the typical Byzantine formalism and stiffness prevail, then a long period of typical Byzantine practice, and finally the gradual return toward illustrationalism and the camera-aspect. But the subject belongs rather to the medieval chapters and the treatment of art in the monasteries.

It was the opulent capital, Constantinople, that sent westward the main stream of ivories, coloured enamels, illuminations, textiles, and goldsmith's work that was to enrich many a minor court and decorate many a major and minor church far from the Golden Horn, to revolutionize or transform, too, the European conception of the arts until the return to classicism at the period of the Renaissance. There were other great producing centres, for the Byzantine Empire was far-flung and scores of local administrators, bishops, and lesser monarchs encouraged the arts. Salonika, Antioch, Trebizond, Nicæa, Ephesus, and the cities of Crete afford separate histories of the Byzantine arts.

For Constantinople the years from 330 to the death of Justinian in 565 had been a first Byzantine Golden Age. The building art and the decorative crafts then had flowered in the Church of Santa Sophia and the Church of the Holy Apostles, and in the surrounding lavish palace groups. There the magnificence of Roman ostentation had been married to Eastern colour and formalism—a much more satisfactory spouse, artistically speaking and in the light of history, than had been naturalistic classic design.

Efforts had been made, nevertheless, to import the masterpieces of classic art and to revive its spirit. Theodosius the Great transferred the Olympic Games to Constantinople in the late fourth century, along with appropriate antiques in the way of statuary and vases. But the Oriental spirit refused to give way. Some say that the Greeks themselves, after their long retirement from creative endeavour during the Hellenistic and Roman eras, had come awake under Eastern nourishment of the spirit and must themselves be credited as the leading artists of Byzantium. It is known that the streams of influence from Persia—that too-little-recognized fountain of artistic riches—continued to flow through that Golden Age. At Constantinople the forms of Byzantine art had been definitely and unmistakably set, and countless masterpieces had been created, by the mid-sixth century.

Between this and a second Golden Age there was a period of difficulties. Reaction set in, politically and to a lesser extent artistically. Perhaps it was only the inevitable pause that marks the period of paying for luxurious splendour, extravagant over-building and over-expansion. There was the trouble in the West, where the barbarian forces were overrunning great areas of the Holy Empire and crystallizing their own rival state. To the eastward the blazing fire of Islam had spread from Arabia to Persia, and had burned away from the Empire the provinces of Syria and Egypt. Even Greece

was invaded by heathens of another sort. And the Bulgars, having decimated a Byzantine army—and made a king's drinking-cup of the emperor's skull—swept down to the very walls of Constantinople itself. The threat was removed presently and pleasantly when a succeeding Bulgar king came over to Christianity. In that way too a threatening Russia came under the sway of the Byzantine Empire.

But the emperors somehow pushed through to a new beginning, drove away the Moslems who also had been knocking at the capital's gates, and gradually reclaimed great regions lost to hostile powers. A.D. 843 is the date generally set as the beginning of the second Golden Age, and a re-beginning for Byzantine art. In the interval, however, there occurred a war over art which is unique in history. What is known as the Iconoclast controversy—the idol-breakers' war—was fought with words, prohibitions, and manifestos, and finally led to political overturns and actual military actions and bloodshed. Perhaps never before had pictures led men to strap on mail and take up swords.

There had been for many centuries a strain of non-representational art out of the North Asiatic source-land, by which Persia had been strongly influenced through all phases of its art, except in those times when the early world-conquerors modelled their culture upon that of the Babylonians. Abstract motives and near-abstractions based on floral forms were the chief elements of ornamental design, animals entered much more largely into representational arts than did the human figure, even Greek and Roman. Obsession with the human body failed to affect the Persians profoundly. When humans did appear in picturing, the Oriental habit was to formalize them into hardly more than heraldic emblems and plastic motives. Art was impersonal, stripped of the reality of man's material, anatomical world.

This predisposition toward abstraction and impersonality in art had from the start gone along with the Byzantine way of thinking. It is eloquently evident in the early textiles, sculptured capitals and manuscript illuminations. Not only does the general disposition of the various elements in paintings and mosaics illustrate it, the very figures in murals and icons have given up their humanness and sentimental naturalism—so much so that they have seemed to the realists "scarecrows" and caricatures.

Then when Mohammed made his religion out of a miscellany of Hebrew, Christian, and Persian theology and custom, he took over the Mazdean and Hebraic prohibition of imaging. Some say that it was the Moslems parading



this with other superior cultural conceptions, who frightened the emperors of the Byzantine Empire into taking sides with the iconoclasts within their own church. The rulers simply recognized a schism which long had existed, for powerful influences had set themselves against figurative art long before. Chiefly there was agitation against the monasteries that produced a great deal of the minor art. There are even those who believe that the prohibition was calculated primarily to cripple the growing power of the monastic element in the church. Still others give the emperors—Eastern in origin by now—credit for sincerely believing that any representation of the Divine in human form was impious.

On this point Strzygowski quotes Ter-Mkrttchian's report that there "arose a party which opposed the veneration of pictures as an un-Christian innovation." He quotes also an early historian of Anatolia who, in the seventh century, wrote that "a great Synod was held in Cæsarea, and the painting of pictures in the House of God was sanctioned. Hence the painters grew arrogant, and wished to place their art above all the other church arts." To which the artist-monks sincerely replied "Our art is the means of enlightening old and young alike, whereas but few can read the Holy Scriptures."

The actual order against imaging, in 717, had more than artistic and religious consequences. In the East picture-making continued, sometimes in more or less open defiance of the higher powers, or again clandestinely, though more energy than before went into illuminated manuscripts, which could be easily hidden, and less into murals. But there was a furious destruction of mosaics, frescoes, and icons throughout the Empire.

The political results, however, concerned the whole delicate relationship of Byzantium and Rome. There had been growing a division of interest between the reviving Western Holy Empire and the troubled Eastern Christian Rome had got the forms of its art largely from the East. Now in effect the East was repudiating what it had imposed upon the West. Both parties seized upon the question of "idolatrous" art as a convenient issue, and actually fought in the field over it. By 800 the Roman Church had completed the split from the Eastern, henceforth Orthodox Church, and through his astute political alliance with Charlemagne the Pope could defy any further attempt to subjugate the West. As a consequence, representational art was to be fully developed as a legitimate prop of religious faith in all the Latin and Germanic countries.

In the East the iconoclasts prevailed for a little more than a century. What



St Peter Cloisonne enamel Byzantine  
 [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

treasures of art were then destroyed no one will ever know. The destruction of Catholic art at the time of the Reformation in Flanders and Holland and Germany, can hardly have been more catastrophic. But there was one offsetting gain particularly for Europe: great numbers of artists and craftsmen more true to art than to the letter of church law migrated to the centres of Western spiritual and cultural endeavour. Doubtless large quantities of ivories, enamels, icons, and manuscripts were then transported to the Western countries.

When the iconoclasts at last lost their hold on the Eastern ruling power—representational imaging was again legalized in the Orthodox Church in 843—there was an immediate flowering of the typical Byzantine arts. This is the beginning of the so-called Second Golden Age. As regards the Byzantine



*St John Cloisonné enamel Byzantine*  
*[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

capital, the period is generally dated from 843 to the sack of Constantinople by the brother-Christians of the Latin Church in 1204 three and one-half centuries of almost uninterrupted production of works of art and luxury. Prosperity returns, the sumptuous and extravagant court is re-established, and all the arts flourish.

Again there are the magnificent imperial palaces and the gorgeously decorated churches. The mosaic art is carried on to more spectacular and memorable achievements, always in Christian mythology and symbolism, with the golden background or underlay now standard. The monuments are to be seen not only at Constantinople, Salonika, and Daphne but in faraway Venice and Sicily. But just here it seems wise to turn to those lesser arts which mirror the glow and spirit of Byzantium in pictures and baubles that can be held in the palm of the hand.

The enamels capture the colourfulness and vigour of the larger arts to an extraordinary degree. The colours are lustrous and brilliant, though on occasion they are brought to the subtlest balance of nuances, or muted over and almost muted. The technique, unlike that of European miniature painting, lends itself to broad effect and formalized rhythmic orchestration. The backgrounds are suppressed, the plastic penetration is slight. But nothing could be more vital, vigorous, and elegant than these miniature portraits and icons and decorative medallions.

The Byzantine enamels follow upon an earlier Persian development, which, however, had been distinguished by a lesser mastery. The technique had been perfected in Persia, though the craft had been known to several more ancient civilizations, in both East and West. The first known reference to enamelling is said to be that of Philostratus, of the third century, who reported that "the barbarians of the regions of the ocean are skilled in fusing colours on heated brass, which become hard as stone, and render the ornament thus produced durable."

In the Byzantine work the divisions between colours are in gold line. Gold wire was flattened, and fastened, edge-on, to the metal background, forming the outlines of the design. Then the separated areas were filled with enamel (glass powder worked to a paste) and fired. When the surface was polished, the effect was as lustrous as porcelain-painting, but with its own characteristic body-deep colouring and posterous conventionalization.

In general this was an accessory art, the enamel plaques and medallions being used for enrichment of crowns, book-covers, icon frames, and altar-fronts—as seen today in the famous *Palo d'Oro* in St Mark's at Venice. There are, too, independent jewel-like objects such as the so-called Beresford Hope Cross in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Sometimes the medallions decorated royal or ecclesiastical robes. Again the reliquaries—the coverings for such sacred relics as bits of the True Cross or saints' bones—were natural settings for this sort of sumptuous bejewelling. But today in the museums there are more of the enamels to be seen separated from their original background and purpose. In no way are they unworthy when facing the world alone, when judged for their self-contained æsthetic merits. The notable series at the Metropolitan Museum of Art is a sheer joy to the eye.

If the enamels have a certain affinity with the glowing Byzantine mosaics, the icons are similarly a miniature form not distantly related to both painted fresco and mosaic mural. There were, by the way, small portable mosaic



*The Annunciation. Portable mosaic  
[Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum]*

pictures. But the examples surviving today are hardly sufficient to demand attention. The painted icons, on the other hand, can be seen in all museums and in remaining Orthodox churches and homes. Until the revolution of 1917, Russia was strewn with them.

The name icon—meaning merely “image,” from the Greek *eikon*—has been narrowed to designate the small portraits of sacred personages set up by the faithful of the Orthodox Church as objects of devotion or aids to worship. “Portrait” is perhaps a misleading word in this connexion, for the icons in general are stiffly formalized, abstracted, conventional. The images have been



Theophanes the Greek *The Ascension* Icon of the Novgorod school  
Russia 14th century [Christy Hatcher Gallery]

made in great numbers continuously from about the seventh century to the twentieth and to this day something of the original gold and brilliant-colour atmosphere clings to them. The ground was usually a panel of gilded wood though sometimes metal. The picture was painted on this and the outlines were then cut through to disclose the gilt beneath. Types of portraiture were early established and there are a few persisting manners of execution. It is likely that icons of this very sort were common as far back as iconoclast days but the greater number of known examples dates from the twelfth century and later. There are lists of known masters of the craft particularly those of Russia where Orthodox Church art traditions were fostered after the fall of



*Crucifixion* Ivory, 10th–11th century  
 [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

the Byzantine Empire. It may be that no other field among the smaller arts is so rich in veritable masterpieces.

Sculpture in the large was not an outstanding Byzantine art. A certain amount of architectural sculpture—capitals and ornamental columns—may be said to be in the round. But perhaps on second view each piece will prove a sort of juncture of several reliefs. The average capital is solidly round, with the typical Byzantine blunted roundness, but from the point of view of decoration it is one more place for a low-relief composition.

The deeply incised but carefully unified panel-carving, which is more

often associated with the Moslem flowering, culminating in the arabesque, was originally a Persian-Syrian-Christian art. In Coptic Egypt, in Syrian monasteries, in Santa Sophia at Constantinople, in the Ravenna churches, at Monreale and Palermo, the same richly carved friezes and capitals and pilaster-panels are to be found. The vitality combined with intricacy, the vigorous movement combined with delicate tracery, persist through an extraordinarily large range of examples.

But the unique Byzantine achievement within the art of sculpture is in the ivories. It may be that the sentiment that discouraged imaging precluded the cutting of monumental statues<sup>1</sup>, but there was no such prohibition of miniature reliefs. The typical Eastern flatness is here continued. (It will be remembered that the Scythian animals, when they are, rarely, in the round, are partly flattened, toward a wafer-form. Hindu sculpture, like the Byzantine most strongly in debt to Persia and to the Scythian steppe-art, is likewise most effective in relief, except for the Buddhas.) Here too the characteristic Byzantine formalism rounds the outlines, places the subject-elements with decorative near symmetry. Among the accessories are typical Byzantine architectural elements: the round arch, the column traced over with abstract patterning, the arabesque panel.

The ivory carvings, indeed, are perfectly in the spirit of the enamels and the icons. There is the same mastery of space-filling, of melodic disposition of figures, of answering ornamental rhythms, and something, too, of the same elegance and—insofar as this uncoloured medium can be said to have it—colourfulness.

The ivories, like the enamels, were oftener considered accessory decorations than independent works of art. Although they were common as semi-independent diptychs and triptychs for altars or private chapels, they usually ornament book-covers, caskets, even thrones. The plaques, sometimes obviously a single leaf detached from triptych or polyptych, are found today in all the larger museums, and in great abundance in the treasures of Catholic cathedrals and churches, whither they were brought in ancient days as gifts of the faithful or as spoils carried home by the Crusaders—who were first-class looters as well as avengers of infidel blasphemies. The output of Con-

<sup>1</sup> There are a few exceptions: notably a colossal statue of an emperor with later arms and legs now at Barletta in Southern Italy; and a high relief group decorating an outer corner of the Treasury of St Mark's Venice; and there are numerous transitional examples of the time when artists tried to assimilate Roman and Hellenistic portraiture to Oriental method. But the idea of monumental sculpture simply did not prevail.





*Christ on the Cross Relief panel*  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

stantinopolitan ivory studios must have been enormous in the Golden Age, and other centres are known for specialized types within the craft.

The ivory carvings, of course, deal primarily with Christian iconography, though there are excursions into glorification of the emperors. A favourite subject was Christ crowning the emperor and empress, as in the beautifully balanced decorative plaque in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris. Sometimes the subject is an out-and-out celebration of the ruler alone, without religious attributes or significance; but more common are the icon-like images of the

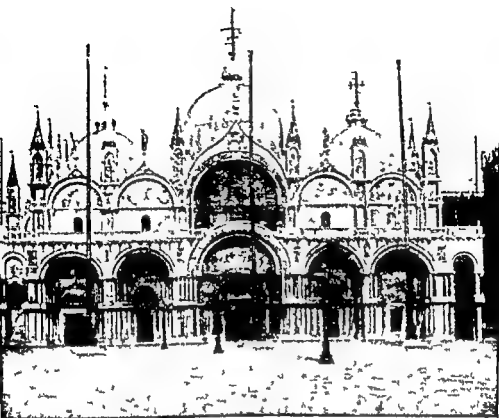
Virgin, or the Virgin and Child, the Christ, or the apostles—often in groups, sometimes in a full episodic composition, though treated with the conventionalism of heraldic emblems

From these individual pieces the relics range to such a composite work as the bishop's throne or cathedra of Maximian, still preserved in Ravenna. This veritable monument of the ivory-carver's art dates back to the sixth century, and is ascribed by experts to Syrian or possibly Egyptian craftsmen (certain details suggest Eastern Mediterranean geography and fauna). The chair is actually a composition of carefully joined ivory plaques. As usual in the better Oriental work, the design bears inspection either as a whole, as a synthesized unit, or for the perfection of each panel-composition or patterned area.

The elegance and decorative colourfulness of the miniature mosaic, enamel, and ivory plaque can be found throughout a wider range of "minor" arts. There are metal works of the artificers in gold, silver, and bronze which are every bit as masterly and engaging: crosses and chalices and platters, and ornamental shields richly figured. There are metal icons, and all through the later centuries Russia has carried on the tradition of shrine figures on painted board-panels enriched with metal plates, often in repoussé designs and with precious stones set in.

The textiles may serve to complete the roster of arts in little which partake of the larger colourfulness and decorativeness of Byzantine genius. The figured cloth of gold, the embroidered robes, the woven linens, are of that general family that looks to Persia as source. Their special beauty, largeness of conception, vigorous floral and animal designs, and rich colouring have perhaps been sufficiently described earlier in the chapter, where Coptic textile art is analysed and illustrated. The true Byzantine work is perhaps a little less distinctive, more directly derived from Sassanian Persia, but the artisans went on later to special types and variations, and the elaborate vestments of Christian priests both East and West seem descended from the opulent textiles of the Byzantine workshops.

The story of Byzantine art is literally never done. The reader should be reminded specifically of the treasures of typical works at Venice and in the cities of Sicily. But it is more important to recall that never before or after was a great school of art to send forth streams of influence and of actual works to so many countries and through so long a period of time. It was in the third and fourth centuries that Rome began to show mosaics in the Eastern style,



St. Mark's Church, Venice most colourful of Byzantine monuments in the West  
Eleventh century, with later additions

It was seven centuries later that the Romanesque art of Northern Italy, France, and Germany was brought forth, on foundations more Byzantine than classic or "barbarian." Again in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there was a renaissance in the territory still belonging to the Eastern Church. Nor were some parts of Europe even at the opening of the twentieth century innocent of monastery-studios carrying on the icon-tradition.

Until recently mural painting had known scant mention in histories of Byzantine art. Nor were Western scholars other than loath to concede a derivation of Italian painting from the Byzantine. It was considered more seemly that European religious art be shown forth as a reflowering of the

classic. Eyes educated to naturalism saw the Eastern product as impossibly stiff and coarse, and in no way worthy of recognition as the ancestor of Sienese and Florentine loveliness. Today the decisive influence of the East is recognized, and every evolutionary step from Byzantine iconographic painting to the normal Western art as developed by Duccio and Giotto can be illustrated. The special methods and idioms had been brought to, or echoed in, Rome, Ravenna, and Venice at various dates from the fifth century to the twelfth, and there is evidence of even more direct lineage in the actual half-century during which Cimabue and Duccio were active—records tell of Greek painters' coming then to Central Italy.

On their own account, moreover, the strictly formalized Byzantine frescoes and mosaics are found to be characterized by the virtues of intense plastic life and rich decorative figuring. It is recognized too that seldom in the history of the arts has a type of expression persisted so long unchanged. There are illuminations and mosaics and frescoes of the fifth and sixth centuries in which one can recognize those characteristics of opulent patterning, stuffy rhythmic figuring, and posteresque flatness which are evident in the more mature Byzantine painting of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and again in the beautiful murals of the fourteenth and the fifteenth.

It is the later things that have recently excited lovers of formalized art, as examples were rediscovered in Greece, Macedonia, Crete, Constantinople, and the Balkan countries. Western students are finding it worth while to make pilgrimages to the monastery at Daphne, where the walls were painted in the eleventh century, and to Mount Athos and Mistra, where the later Byzantine renaissance is illustrated. In Constantinople, in the Kahriyeh Djami, which had been the Christian Church of the Chora, the decorations, dating from the fourteenth century, are not less than masterly. Thus is made known a monumental art, grown up beside the little icon, which like it combines the virtues of the arts of East and West.

*Persia, Arabia, and the Tide of Moslem Art*

IN THE drama of art as it has been recorded, Persia has had a stepchild's role. Seldom given major credit, looked down upon from the eminence of classic culture, neglected by historians because the body of its art is scattered, Persia nevertheless has done more of the hard work of origination, crystallization, and transmission of the spirit and style of the art of the Orient than any other civilization. The Persian name turns up casually in the chronicles of every culture from Spain to China. Persian style-marks, even identifiable motives, can be traced in works scattered from Baghdad to Arles and Kairwan and Cordoba, in the other direction from Ispahan to India, Cambodia, and Polynesia, and only a little less directly to Sakkara in Egypt, to Kiev in Ukraina, and to Byzantine Athens. A silken banner treasured by the Japanese in a shrine at Nara since the ninth century bears a Persian design. Charlemagne was wrapped for burial in a Persian shroud. A Persian architect was specially summoned to design Tamerlane's tomb. It may be added that the Persian rug or its derivative is still standard on European and American floors.

It is only within the past generation that art historians have recognized Persia's part as other than secondary, but gradually a devoted group of investigators has brought to light the evidence that makes mandatory the assignment of a major role to this country. From the role of the low and unassuming stepchild, Persia is recast as protagonist in the play and counterplay of Asiatic cultural development. It may be that Iran will yet be recognized as the mother of the Oriental arts.

After the decay of Babylon and the disappearance of her realistic arts, it was the Persians who became the outstanding builders and the most accomplished craftsmen in Asia. An invasion from Persia gave India the Brahmin caste and therefore the Brahman and Buddhist arts, and this in-

fluence went to shape the surpassing sculpture of Java and Cambodia and Champa. Through a northern route the Iranian and Indian cultures were welcomed into China, where actual Persian compositions are found in figured silks. Tibet, Turkestan, Armenia, Syria, these all drew from the one centre, Arabia, too, and even Christian Egypt and Abyssinia, in a corner of Africa that has more affinity with its Eastern than its Western conquerors. Finally it was Persia that determined the Moslem arts, whether arch and dome, or wooden or stone arabesque, or textile or pottery or metalsmithing. It is essentially an Iranian stamp that is upon the wares of Samarkand, Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, and Tangier.

In a sense the Mohammedans conquered Persia, but at the most the Persians took over an incipient Arabian-Mohammedan art based on their own, reshaped it, and sent out designers and craftsmen for the glory of Islam. In this matter of Persia and Islam, the former may, indeed, be thought of as the ages-old fostering civilization. For twelve centuries, from the first Iranian conquest of Egypt, Lydia, and Babylon to the founding of the Moslem religion, the Medes and Persians and Parthians and Sassanians had been developing a tradition and a way of art. Racially of one stock, and culturally of one type, after the incidental revolutions and assimilations, they had fixed a recognizable style and nurtured out of it cultures far and near. Islam on the other hand, was a sudden raging fire of faith and evangelism, which picked up this typically Oriental art and respread it over half the known world.

From an absolute view, Mohammed and his bedouin followers had no art. Their nearest associates, the Jews, although finely literary, likewise had no gifts of architecture, ornamentation, and craftsmanship to hand on Persia, richly endowed with the sensuous-artistic spirit, quickly embracing the new religion when invaded by the fanatic Moslem hordes, had the creative faculty that was complementary to Arab faith. Persia again was originator, Islam was instrument.

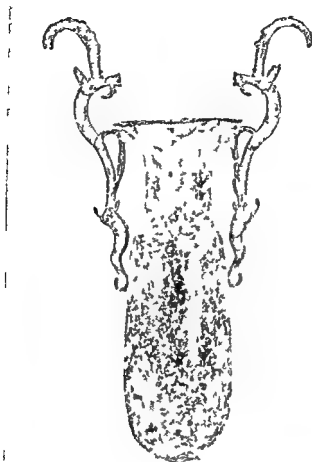
The background of Iranian culture might be likened to one of those matchless Persian rugs in which smouldering fires of colour are more important than any definite design in which elusive themes are discovered, lost, and rediscovered. Through it all, too elusive yet for actual recording is an element out of the Eurasian steppe art, the animal art once known as Scythian, from the Russian-Siberian plains country to which Persia is a



Figure from bridle bit Bronze, Luristan, about 6th century B.C.  
[Courtesy Oriental Institute, University of Chicago]

natural southern gateway Only once did this Northern Oriental art appear in Persia in its purest, nearly primitive form the Luristan bronzes are as typical as the actual Siberian works or the Far Eastern examples from the Ordos Desert adjoining China

Recovered from the tombs of ancient warriors, in Western Persia, the Luristan relics are vigorously decorative The motives are usually animal figures conventionalized almost to the point of abstraction The intent of the artist-craftsman is invariably decorative rather than illustrative Here appear the style-marks that will be met again and again in Iranian history the vigorous, virile, strongly accented main movement, in a composition only slightly asymmetrical, and the introduction of contrasting areas of formalized patterning



Vase with figures Bronze Lutistan Collection M and R Stora  
 [Photo courtesy American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology]

The Persians first appear in recorded history descending from the Iranian highlands to menace the Babylonian communities. As told in an earlier chapter, Cyrus and his immediate successors in the sixth century B.C. toppled over one after another of the over-expanded or exhausted nations of the Eastern Mediterranean: Lydia, Egypt, Babylon. By 525 B.C. the Persian Empire was the greatest in extent known to human history up to that time. The conquering Achaemenid dynasty, which established the first recogniz-





*Ibex. Bronze, Achæmenid period Collection Oscar Raphael, London  
[Photo, courtesy American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology]*

ably Persian culture, lasted two centuries—until in 331 B.C., after a failure to break through the westward barrier set up by Greece, it in turn finds itself exhausted (and perhaps over-luxurious) and falls before the triumphant march of Alexander.

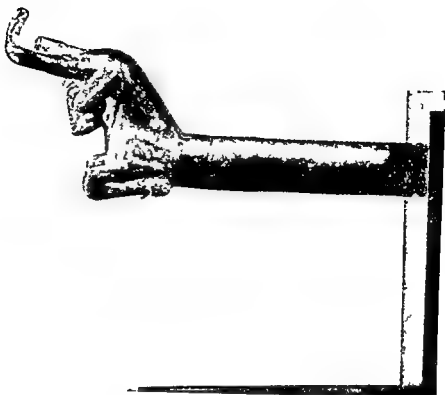
The Achæmenid artists had proved more adaptive of foreign notions than independently creative; though what they took from Babylon and Egypt and, later and less notably, from Greece was respoken with a Persian accent:

flowing ultimately, in more colourful and more abstract form, into a distinctive national expression. As noted in the chapter on the ancient Near East, the Achæmenids had seen the great palaces of their vassals, the Mesopotamian kings, as they had seen the vast hypostyle halls of the conquered Egyptians, and had believed that their own greatness as world conquerors should be celebrated by equally impressive structures. The resulting regal palaces and audience halls at Persepolis and Susa, as judged today in fragments and partial restoration, exhibit at once the mixed nature of their derivation and a distinctive Persian contribution, evident chiefly in a feeling for grace, stylization, and integrity of ornament, with colourfulness.

In the sculpture there was less realism, more formalization, than in the Babylonian prototype. In architectural members there appeared a greater elegance, an advance toward a dignified "system" of building. Already in certain sculptural accessories and bits there had resulted a combination of virtues destined to lie at the heart of Persian art through all after-centuries: a masterly sense of space-filling, with vigour of movement preserved within rich all-over effect.

There followed several centuries of rule by invaders, first the Alexandrian Greeks, then the Parthians. It is supposed that when Alexander came, he brought his own sculptors and artificers, and that he left them to practise in the cities he founded. It was in Babylon, on the way back from his Persian adventure, that the great dictator died. When the newly expanded empire immediately, and naturally, fell to pieces, the Iranian lands were allotted to the dead emperor's general Seleucus, who established in Persia the non-Persian Seleucid dynasty, but the immigrant sculptors and the efforts of the alien rulers to bring in Western culture seem to have had little effect. Instead of showing the influence of Hellenistic naturalism, the next marked phases are more strikingly than before decorative and near-abstract. The larger monuments of the time have almost wholly disappeared. That disappearance in itself suggests the minor effect of this invasion. The point may be that the Persians artistically were more civilized than their conquerors. At any rate it was their culture that persisted.

As early as 256 B.C. the Parthians, a people of the northeastern steppe group, began to exert pressure on the Seleucids, and in 140 B.C. they in turn took over all Persia. The succeeding Parthian dynasty was, one might say, Persianized Scythian. To one who knows the Scythian or steppe art, and later Persian art, it would seem that this is a major link in the chain that was to



*Bull's Head Ornament on a handle bronze Achæmenid period Collection Eustache de Lorey, Paris [Photo courtesy American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology]*

result in Sassanian pottery, textiles, and metalwork, and so to influence the Byzantine and Moslem cultures. The relics are rare but eloquent.

Here history deals briefly with periods that actually cover centuries. It is best to pick up the thread of art with the important Sassanian era (A.D. 226-641), which is marked by the enthusiastic recapturing of the old mastery. The works are of a characteristic sort and they indicate that the ideals of the Achæmenid emperors, as developed at Susa and Persepolis, had been more or less consciously fostered by artists and craftsmen in the intervening troubled centuries. Ardashur, the founder of the Sassanian line of emperors, claimed descent from the Achæmenid house. He established a capital at Ctesiphon, over in old Babylonia—and again the arts flourished.

The brilliant brocades of the time may be taken as index of the luxurious

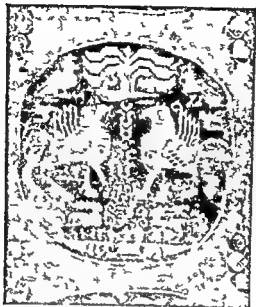
yet refined culture of the reviving empire. There are experts who place them as the supreme expression of man's genius in the textile medium. The compositions are broadly conceived. The figures are large yet are held within rigid and delicate mathematical patterning, in circles or diapered webs or intertwined bands. The figure-dominant or subject-motive may be a formalized animal or flower or an heraldically summarized human being. It is this that affords the vigour, the plastic livingness. The patterned frame and traced-over areas act as a confining field and a decorative restraint. Despite the essential vitality, there is a lyric delicacy or fastidiousness in the handling. The splendour is made a quiet one.

One stresses this particular Persian stylization because the Western road of art has led directly away from it. Whether in silks or pottery or figured metals, the Persian design seems to say: art must be vital, living, colourful, instinct with movement, but the art of a cultured poetic people must be, *no less*, strictly formalized, rhythmic, restrained.

The Persian's is the craftsman's approach, not that of the limner who sets out to copy a naturally beautiful object, or to idealize one less beautiful, or to celebrate a person or a god. Up to a certain controlled point, the Oriental finds motives in representation. But as artist, he is at the far pole from the anatomical, idealizing representational art of the Greeks. His search for livingness will not lead into Western preoccupation with the personal and the sentimental, nor, on the other hand, toward the photographic and the "natural."

It is nature's business, says the Persian, to create the natural, the artist's business is to create new plastic forms, new rhythms, conditioned by the special virtues and potentialities of the medium he is using. He never forgets the abstract order, the rhythmic vitality, the melodic fullness, characteristic of the decorator. In his work there is always something of the carpet, the tapestry, the flat-lying field of contrived design, little of the realist's window upon life. There is the bowl-shape to be remembered, the panel to be filled, the surface that cushions the eye to be respected.

The Sassanian stuffs beautifully illustrate this way of conceiving the design, of filling space colourfully, even luxuriously. There is close affinity with the Syrian and the Coptic cloths of the same centuries, with the probability of prior origin lying in Persia. In any case the centres of manufacture were closely related, and from them went out the designs and the craftsmanship that determined *Byzantine design*. There are legends of the extravagant



Silk tissue, with griffins and deer Persian or Mesopotamian 11th or 12th century  
[*Courtesy Textile Museum of the District of Columbia*]

quantities of Sassanian stuffs exported to the order of the late Roman emperors of the West, and records of lovely Persian fabrics brought back later by the Crusaders Mâle is willing to credit the glory of the windows at Chartres partly to the inspiration of Sassanian tapestries

The animals as they appear in Persian silks—as also in pottery and metalware—are worth special study They are gorgeously spirited, nobly alive The links between these and the Luristan bronzes are still lost, one may go back instead to the bulls of the Susa sculptured capitals, to the possibly related horses and stags of the Sanchu gates, India's oldest sculptural monument In latest and in earliest manifestation there is the virility seen in the Chinese Han animals

Subjects aside from animals, when representational rather than abstract, are likely to deal with objects and scenes appropriate to the restrained luxuriousness of the art-using classes with gardens and hunting episodes and courtly routine The visual arts accommodated themselves to a way of life, reflected a poetic or lyric aspect of gentle living There is, too, a geographic and climatic correspondence, an appropriateness to environment, as fitting as the lushness of Hindu art to its fecund land The Persian park-like landscapes and

the palace gardens immemorably celebrated by the poets are implicit in these designs

Where the picture element, as a document from nature, sensibly exists, the drawing is formal and summary. There is no perspective. There are no shadows. The designs are not the less full and vital on this account. Rather, line carries a greater burden of expressiveness. Contours become marvelously energetic. The more delicate features are traced with rare feeling and subtlety. All-over patterning is used exceptionally for enrichment and variation.

In a collection in Leningrad there are Persian silver platters and vessels which are counted among the foremost treasures of figured metal in all the world. Into this art the Sassanian craftsmen have carried over the vigour, the decorativeness and the colourfulness we have noted in textile design. The process is in general that known as repousse in which a relief design is punched or hammered up from the back. The compositions, as before, are notable for virility of design and for the true Persian minor rhythms in formal patterning.

These distinctive virtues are found also within the limitations of the jeweller's medium, in the gold armlet which forms part of the same 'Treasure of the Oxus' in Leningrad. The enamels have been lost out of the cloisons but the piece could hardly have a greater effect of rich ornamentalism than now. And here again are the spirited animals. The whole is finely simple yet intricately decorative. Persian cloisonné works are fairly rare, but it was Persian artists who at this time perfected the ancient Egyptian technique, and handed it on to Byzantium and to China.

Sassanian monumental art is but poorly represented comparatively, in surviving statues and buildings. This circumstance is partly due to the fanaticism of the invading Moslems. They destroyed a great deal of sculpture, because of the Koran's prohibition of human representation in art. The Moguls too razed entire cities. Most of the important sculpture remaining is badly defaced as are the rock-cut tombs of the emperors at Naksh-e-Rustum. Even the finest works of the minor arts might similarly be little known to later collectors had not the products of Persia been sought after in bordering countries and even as far as Italy and China. The collection of figured vessels and jewels in Russia is supposed to have crossed the border in trade for northern furs.



Figured silver dish Sassanian period *The Hermitage, Leningrad*  
[Photo, courtesy *American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology*]

A further reason for lack of figures comparable to those of Egypt, India, or Gothic Europe lies in the nature of the Persian Zoroastrian religion. This enlightened faith discouraged the making of devotional images, although not prohibiting representational art in other than religious channels. The sculptural impulse was turned into metalwares, minor crafts, and near-abstract decorative accessories for architecture.

The great vault of the palace at Ctesiphon is the chief exhibit indicating the original grandeur and magnificence of Sassanian architecture. Although

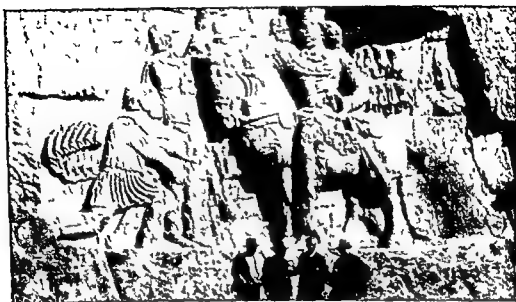
the structure was almost destroyed, and was looted of fabulous treasures in the way of furnishings, the immense vault of the throne room and the adjacent walls afford mute testimony to the monumental luxuriousness of sixth-century Persian building.

The ruins, however, are such that they appeal historically rather than intrinsically. How much of the way of building is Persian, in the sense of being an original growth of this land, is problematic. Structurally this is an architecture of arch, vault, and dome. From it was to develop the Moslem system of building, after the invasion. Something of the sort is also the ancestor of the early Christian church upon which the Byzantine style was founded. There are investigators who prefer to divide the credit between Persia and Syria. Others trace the development, though as yet on hardly sufficient evidence, to ancient Babylon, where the barrel vault was known. But in the light of recent investigations by Strzygowski, Persia, with Armenia contributing, seems the likeliest creative source of both the Byzantine and the Moslem architectural impulse.

The art of the Mohammedans, commonly thought of as Arab art, was not originated by the culture for which it is thus named, nor are its centres of production or its masterpieces to be found importantly in its "native" land. Although that land gave a name to its outstanding decorative feature—the arabesque—it was elsewhere that Islamic art had its roots and developed its distinctive flower. The roots, as we have seen, were largely Persian. The full flower is less to be observed in Mecca and Medina than in Ispahan and Baghdad, in Damascus, Samarkand, Cairo, Granada.

A century before Constantine founded his Eastern capital and enfolded the Christian masses within the Byzantine Empire, Ardashir had established the Sassanid dynasty in Persia. Long before Justinian built Santa Sophia, Persian artists had created the Sassanian masterpieces of silken brocades and silver vessels and enamelled jewels. The two bodies of art, Persian and Byzantine, had grown side by side. But politically these two empires had, off and on for generations, been at each other's throat. By the opening of the seventh century both were exhausted with the drain of repeated wars. Chosroes II of Persia had conquered Egypt and Syria and Asia Minor, and had brought his armies to the gates of Constantinople, he had, moreover, terribly affronted the Christians by marching into Jerusalem and marching away again with the most venerated Christian relic, the Cross on which





Rock-cut tomb of Darius Naksh-e-Rostum  
 [Photo, courtesy Oriental Institute, University of Chicago]

Jesus had been crucified. Then the fortunes fluctuated and turned temporarily to Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor. It was at this moment that Mohammed, after his years of patient and impatient dreaming, studying, and plotting, won over his own Arabian people and daringly set out to subjugate the world for Allah.

It is related that in 628 Mohammed sent identical notes to the emperors of the two vast empires to the northward of his unimportant state—if one can call the wandering bedouins and the clusters of traders' houses on the caravan routes a state. The notes were in the nature of an ultimatum. They called upon the two emperors—and indeed upon all the rulers of the earth—to change heavenly masters and to serve thenceforward the One and Only God. They were signed "Mohammed, the Prophet of God." Heraclius is not known to have replied, but Kavadh of Persia was outraged. The incident is thus succinctly reported by H. G. Wells in *The Outline of History*:

At Ctesiphon they knew more about this Muhammed. He was said to be a tiresome false prophet, who had incited Yemen, the rich province of Southern Arabia, to rebel against the King of Kings. Kavadh was much occupied with affairs. He had deposed and murdered his father, Chosroes II, and he was attempting to reorganize

the Persian military forces      He tore up the letter, flung the fragments at the envoy, and bade him begone

When this was told to the sender, far away in the squalid little town of Medina, he was very angry "Even so, O Lord!" he cried, "rend thou his kingdom from him"

Within a decade Persia had been subdued and added to the Islamic state. Even more quickly, the Prophet's followers snatched at the edges of the Byzantine realm. They took Syria from the tired Christians without serious effort, even to Antioch. Shortly they had got up into Armenia, and down into Egypt

It does not matter here just how the fire of Islam spread. Groups of Arabs within Persia and Byzantine lands, who had been nominally Christians, or who had accommodately professed themselves Zoroastrians or Manichæans, went over easily to their brethren's faith. There were many Jews easily swayed too. But mostly it was because of the inadequacy of the ties that held vanquished peoples in "loyalty" to one emperor or the other. The new conquerors were fired with an ardent faith, of the sort that breeds leaders and martyrs. Armed opposition melted before this kind of holy crusading. Most of the population merely drifted over.

Mohammedanism began with puritan belief in the simple things. The Caliph Omar, within a decade after Mohammed's death, heard that one of his governors had occupied a luxurious palace on the old imperial Persian model. Immediately he ordered the offending one to tear the palace down, and he inquired acidly if the governor really wanted to be like the magnificent infidel emperors, and to follow them to Hell. Wells retells an equally pertinent episode about Omar's entry into Jerusalem.

Jerusalem made a peculiar condition for its surrender. The city would give itself only to the Caliph Omar in person. He came the six-hundred-mile journey with only one attendant, he was mounted on a camel, and a bag of barley, another of dates, a water-skin, and a wooden platter were his provision for the journey. He was met outside the city by his chief captains—robed splendidly in silks and with richly caparisoned horses. At this amazing sight the old man was overcome with rage. He slipped down from his saddle, scrambled up dirt and stones with his hands, and pelted these fine gentlemen, shouting abuse. What was this insult? What did this finery mean? Where were his warriors? Where were the desert men? He would not let these popinjays escort him. He went on with his attendant and the smart Emirs rode afar off—well out of range of his stones. He met the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who had apparently taken over the city from its Byzantine rulers, alone

With the Patriarch he got on very well. They went round the Holy Places together, and Omar, now a little appeased, made sly jokes at the expense of his too magnificent followers.

Here was religion cutting out some of the rank overgrowth about the tree of art.

If Islam then quickly conquered Syria and Persia it is equally certain that the Islamic state, culturally considered, moved over to Syria, then to Persia. The puritanic impulse hardly survived two caliphates. The desert cities, without traditions of art and luxury, could not hold the leaders of a phenomenally successful world movement. Besides, the little Arabian capital was the scene of the pettiest sort of bickering and intrigue over the succession, with murders and womenfolk's jealousies and rival ambitions breeding a very provincial atmosphere.

The next political capital was Damascus, from which the Caliphs soon were ruling a vast territory extending, though not continuously, from the westernmost tip of Europe to the borders of China. The push across Africa had ended with the conquest of parts of Spain, but the Pyrenees proved a permanent barrier, protecting the rest of Europe for Christ and Rome, and the Eastern wave had reached Turkestan, hitherto an unsettled region but more civilized than, say, the Britain or Germany of the time.

Art blossoms again, however, only in the eighth century. Then, after a carnival of massacres and assassinations, a new line of caliphs, the Abbasids, set up the Islamic capital at Baghdad, within a stone's throw of the mound where Babylon had been, and of Ctesiphon, the last native Persian capital. Those followers of the puritanic Caliph Omar who had slipped so easily into magnificent clothes, and that governor who had built the first Moslem-Persian palace, were now vindicated—and surpassed. The Persian arts began to serve sumptuously the new Arabian masters. The palace of Ardashir at Ctesiphon, built seven centuries earlier in an attempt to revive the glories of Persepolis and Susa, had been destroyed, but it found a worthy successor in the palace of Harun-el-Rashid, the Abbasid caliph who ruled Islam in the years on either side of 800. The architecture was that of vault and dome and encrusted ornamentation. One has only to recall the setting of the *Arabian Nights* stories to have the luxurious and splendid atmosphere of it re-created. This palace was the actual setting of the tales.

Invasion and absorption of foreign strains in her culture were no new thing

the Persian military forces      He tore up the letter, flung the fragments at the envoy, and bade him begone

When this was told to the sender, far away in the squalid little town of Medina, he was very angry "Even so, O Lord!" he cried, "rend thou his kingdom from him"

Within a decade Persia had been subdued and added to the Islamic state Even more quickly the Prophet's followers snatched at the edges of the Byzantine realm They took Syria from the tired Christians without serious effort, even to Antioch Shortly they had got up into Armenia, and down into Egypt

It does not matter here just how the fire of Islam spread Groups of Arabs within Persia and Byzantine lands, who had been nominally Christians, or who had accommodately professed themselves Zoroastrians or Manichæans, went over easily to their brethren's faith There were many Jews easily swayed too But mostly it was because of the inadequacy of the ties that held vanquished peoples in "loyalty" to one emperor or the other The new conquerors were fired with an ardent faith, of the sort that breeds leaders and martyrs Armed opposition melted before this kind of holy crusading Most of the population merely drifted over

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to Persia. Her, by right of conquest, to the Babylonian tradition, she had taken something of that permanently into her architecture, though not the Assyrian naturalism in sculpture. From the northeastern steppes, probably the prehistoric homeland of the Medes and the Persians, came, we may believe, that bent toward vigorous decoration with subtle formalization which is central to her style. Perhaps the invading Parthians, from this same north-land, had renewed the strain of conventional and decorative as against realistic art. While masters of Syria and of Egypt, at times, the Persians doubtless received from them in lesser ways. It is to be remembered too that, when Justinian closed the schools of Athens as prejudicial to Christian doctrine, the fugitive teacher-philosophers had been invited to the Sassanian capital. There were influences also from faraway China, even recognizable crossroads of Persian and Chinese art in Eastern Turkestan. Thus in the central East, Persia had accumulated from all directions, had made Oriental art her own.

The Arabs, intellectualists, foremost scientists, and artists in literature, but lacking in the visual creative sense, contributed one new element to the decorative arts. They brought with them to all the countries that became Mohammedan a language that lent itself beautifully to calligraphic ornament. Mohammedanism had ridden out across Asia on the hooves of its cavalry, but its later strength was in obedience to the word of the Koran, and the word came as Arabic. Wherever Islam went, the holy text went. Arabic became the standard devotional language of the Moslem world. It was twined into the ornaments of architecture, pottery, and illuminated manuscripts, all the way from Spain and Morocco to India and Turkestan. Whether in the enriched walls and screens of the Alhambra at Granada or on a lavishly engraved urn picked up in a stall at Samarkand or Delhi, the decorative Arabic calligraphy will be found embedded within the fields of ornament.

It would be idle to think that the Arabs added nothing more to the art which now enfolded their faith. They could not have made the outline of the mosque recognizably the same in Algiers and Cairo and Damascus if they had not stamped on the minds of their Persian and Syrian architects and craftsmen a conviction about life and religion, a philosophy that does intangibly control artistic expression. There is, too, the matter of non-imaging.

The taboo on images and on representation leads to modifications in Persia—and to destruction of earlier works of art. There is a further swing toward abstraction in ornament. The figures will come creeping in again, to



Bowl, 11th-12th century Collection M Larcade  
 [Photo, courtesy American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology]

give accent to panel compositions, to afford a centre of interest to the bowl or the brocaded shawl. And indeed, by the opening of the ninth century the prohibition will be found more honoured in the breach than in the observance. Sir Mark Sykes, in *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, says that "Harun-el-Rashid himself was a wine-bibber, and his palace was decorated with graven images of birds and beasts and men."

Nevertheless, one's first recollection of Islamic art is of gorgeously rich panels of ornament composed out of purely or essentially abstract elements

the field geometrically, parcelled out in diapers or circles or ovals, but pulled together for the eye by the interwoven linear tracings, the bands and tendrils and ribbons. The Mohammedan artist—be he now Persian or Syrian or Egyptian, or mayhap the Arab himself—is, under the Koran's precept, a great geometrizer of natural form. The leaf, the flower, the twining vine, lose natural identity, familiar eccentricity, but the swelling leaf form, the floral roundness, the twining curves, appear distilled to their purest terms, and, repeated, they build up seductive pattern and tracery winning to the eye.

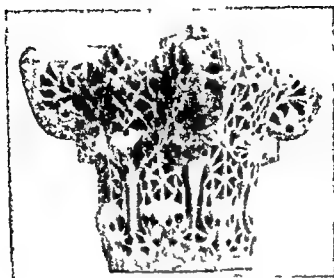
In architecture the walls are encrusted with these flat panels of abstract design, which reappear on cloths, on pottery, on copper. They are the normal, the typical mark of Islamic decoration, and so "arabesque" is not a misnomer for the final manifestation of controlled patterning. If it is merely the Arabian working-out of a thing that had haunted Eastern art for a thousand years, already implicit in Persian and Indian decorative sculpture and shawl, and long since passed on to Coptic Egypt and Christian Syria and to the Byzantines, it yet belongs most perfectly to Islam. The fretwork screens, the carved-wood panels, the stucco friezes, the pierced metal vessels, are lasting evidence of Mohammedan mastery. Sculptured or cut pattern has never elsewhere been so alive and opulent.

There are Western critics who dismiss it all with a wave of the hand, as mere "frosting." It is meant, they say, to beguile the eye momentarily, and has no other significance. Rather, one should remember that this can be, rightly, an integral part of the enrichment of palace or place of devotion, of ivory chest or embroidered gown. It is then a part of the grace and allure and atmosphere of a building or a costume or a cherished casket. That arabesque and related forms of surface decoration were wrongly used in countless cases, obscuring architectural integrity, adorning dishonest or negligent structure, is hardly pertinent. No more are the debased designs of the later centuries, when the creative spirit had fled, and copying had flooded the world with lifeless imitations and cheapened replicas of the authentic works.

To close one's mind against an art because it is frankly, purposefully, and even eloquently a thing of surface manipulation is to cut oneself off from enjoyments legitimate and good—so at least it would seem to this observer. The pleasure is sensuous, the values melodious and harmonic rather than contrapuntal. But within the range, the special conception, Islamic low decoration is incomparably graceful, eye-filling, elegant.

It is worth the time to pause over a carved panel, and to trace out the mathe-





Capital, illustrating Islamic ornament as adapted by the Moors in Spain  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

mathematical system underlying the work, the skeleton of the pattern, then to note the larger symmetries and the variations. There is marvellous ingenuity, and a subtle balance of mathematical and free elements. The geometric, repetitive plan controls, yet the free contours are virile and the rhythm marked. This is the space-filling, decorative, pattern art at a summit. It is worth noting too, how perfectly, in the inscribed designs, the calligraphy is blended into the ensemble.

The arabesque is sometimes interpreted as a symbol of the mysticism of the Arabian mind, of the people of the desert. In its ultimate or purest form the arabesque is said by the symbolists to be a design in which there is no beginning or end. The motives appear and disappear in such near-anonymity that there is no point at which the eye comes to rest. It seems more likely that the development is out of man's normal and unceasing search for fresh devices that will delight the eye. Nor is it true that the best designs are restless.

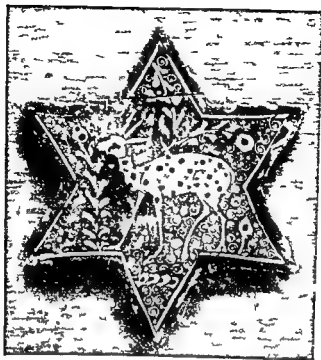
The spirit of typical Islamic art is light, in the best sense, delicate, colourful. There is a strong mathematical undercurrent as in music. There is hardly a hint of realism in it, indeed, the arts which so often run off into realism, painting and representational sculpture, are in the earlier centuries little known to Islam. The logic of the architecture is weak, but the decoration of



Bronze ewer with typical Islamic ornament, Mosul, 13th century  
*[Courtesy University Museum, Philadelphia]*

interiors and courts reaches a new culmination, in subtlety, richness, and enchanting colourfulness.

If Persia gave to the Arabs the formula for the arabesque, she had also gifts of freer design. One of these she developed to new heights of expressiveness in the early centuries of Islamic culture, carried it through a noble cycle of successive triumphs, and by it inspired Spanish, Turkish, even Italian crafts-



Lustreware tile Rhages 11th-13th century  
 [Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D C]

men to creative innovation In the design and decoration of pottery there is no culture that surpasses the Persian China alone rivals the achievement

In some ways the Persian transcends the Far Eastern, merely by reason of adherence to basic virtues Chinese porcelain has more technical refinement, and particularly excels in fabrication of the very hard and translucent wares, and in their shaping to perfect roundness The Persian is more frankly the clay product hand-shaped with the marks of manual freedom upon it, in contours texture and painting The Far Eastern decorated porcelains have often the atmosphere of the hot house In Persian wares the freshness is of the open garden of the flowers dew-covered and sunlit

On Persian soil has been found some of the most sensitively figured prehistoric pottery known, there is in these vases and bowls an extraordinary decorative elegance No continuity with later developments has, however, been proved Indeed a second prehistoric probably pre-Iranian age yields designs less formalized, tending toward realism In early historic times, too,

that part of Persia over on the border of Babylonia fell under the Sumerian-Babylonian influence and showed no originality. But once Persia was firmly established as a nation, there developed a ceramic art with a distinctive and unmistakable loveliness. Throughout its course there are the typical mid-Eastern decorative richness and seductive colour, but there are also a simple dignity and a melodious grace.

As a guide to enjoyment, the story is best picked up well along in the Persian-Moslem period, under the Abbasid caliphs of the ninth and tenth centuries. The traditional local product then blossoms within the general flowering of the arts and luxuries. Some of the vigour and the full decorativeness of the vases and bowls of the time is directly in line with the plastic virility of the preceding Sassanian luxury-arts. Incidentally the old pre-occupation with animals and birds, when dominating 'motive' appears, is again evident.

Lustreware is a first outstanding variety within the group of distinctive potteries native to Persia and Eastern Mesopotamia. In this an evanescent sheen is added under the glaze, by applying and burning away a coating of metallic oxides over the already decorated ground. An iridescent but fleeting undertone thus enriches the soft browns, golden yellows, and olive greens of the painted decoration, adding ruby or orange tints. The lustrous beauty of this ware made it a favourite through several centuries, during which it was produced side by side with other types. It was copied extensively in Egypt—from which country the Persians of fifteen centuries earlier may have learned the finer techniques of enamelling and glazing. It is found, too, in Turkestan to the east and as far as Spain in the west, all within the Islamic empire. Examples are to be enjoyed today, of course, in all the larger museums of Europe and America. Some of the most beautiful of the tiles used in enrichment of Moslem architecture are in this lustreware.

The nominal prohibition of imaging continued, and there is indeed in pottery as elsewhere a large body of abstract or near-abstract patterning and design. But as often, except in Turkestan, the compositions run to freer design, with animals predominating, but not wholly avoiding the human figure either. Perhaps the chief effect of restriction, as regards pottery, was that the wealthy turned to this art more generally for the enrichment of their halls, harems, and garden courts, in the absence of figure-sculpture and painting. Certainly the arts sometimes considered 'minor'—textiles and metals and pottery—were in Islam exceptionally glorified.



Plate Kermanshah 9th-10th century  
 [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

For a time vessels of gold and silver had also been under a ban, as out of keeping with the simplicity of living enjoined by the Prophet upon all true Moslems but the metal arts were merely given pause thereby, to become again a foremost Eastern way of craftsmanship

The figuring came back, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in a sort of pottery that is for some observers the very type-example of Persian art. In the more refined and delicate vessels the exquisite virtues of later Oriental miniature painting seem crossed with the proper decorative richness of earlier



Dish with figures, Rhages type, dated 1210 *Eumorfopoulos Collection, British Museum*  
*[Photo, courtesy American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology]*

ceramic art. The Rhages pottery is perhaps the most conspicuous part of the display. Rhages near Teheran was, until it was destroyed by Jenghiz Khan in 1213, one of the most noted of Persian centres of production. Its wares, even before the development of the exquisitely pictured designs, are known in several variations, all vigorous, some with decorations in relief, some with the lustre adding *iridescence*. But it is the bowls and plates and vases upon which picture-compositions are perfectly combined with abstract ornamental accessory, against a generally free ground of creamy white or turquoise blue,



Bowl with figures 12th-13th century Parish Watts Collection  
 [Photo courtesy American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology]

that form the culminating exhibit. This is a case of the potter become painter of figure-scenes again, painter with an extraordinary sense of appropriate formalization and with all the old Persian mastery of decorative space-filling.

The colourfulness of the earlier potteries is no whit lost in the further extension of subject-interest. Indeed there is no more glamorous harmoniously brilliant display of the colourist's art than in a group of Rhages bowls with geometrically disposed free figures of riders on horses and elephants, or strolling lovers or huntsmen. The type is sometimes identified as that "with



Typical Islamic ornamented architecture in a mosque at Isfahan [Photo by Arthur Upham Pope courtesy American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology]

personages', but in general the prancing horses and other animals are more important, decoratively, than the princes and swordsmen and hunters. And in the end the subject interest is lost in the sensuous enjoyment, the pure delight in the ravishing Persian' blue and gold in the subtly seductive contours and sensitively adjusted proportions.

There are so many periods and types of surpassing achievement in richly decorated pottery that it would require a large history of the one art to give



them proper relation and emphasis, but even the most summary of lists must include mention of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century wares produced at Sultanabad, the new Persian-Islamic capital under the Mogul emperors, whither perhaps the conquerors had taken some of the expert potters of the sacked Rhages. The Eastern Mogul influence is detectable in a certain retreat from the delicacy of the twelfth-century figured vases. There is a lusher, more lavish decorativeness, with a return to all-over patterned effects, and a full-bodied ornamentalism. The arrival of new influences from the East re-affirmed or revived, too, the animal emblemism.

There are wares especially prized by collectors, from Turkestan, from Armenia, and from other regions that were taken into Islam as parts of the Persian empire. Related cultures more distant from Baghdad and Sultanabad—in Egypt and Spain and Turkey—justly find place in specialized accounts. It should be added that Persian pottery will enter the story again in a later chapter, when the perfected arts of miniature painting and carpeting will be accompanied by the production of porcelain-like wares, delicately decorated with a finesse not unrelated to the Chinese. But the essentially Persian, at the same time typically Islamic, elements in the art, as manifested from the ninth to the fourteenth century, have perhaps been sufficiently outlined and illustrated to indicate the exceptional glamorous quality of ceramics at this time, justifying the opinion that hardly ever again, at any time or place in history, was pottery so beautifully conceived and produced.

The mother art, architecture, as it was shaped in Islam into new uses, and into a new variation of the already established mid-Oriental style, is best illustrated in the palaces that follow on the early Persian ones, and in the mosques, which owe much structurally to the Christian domed and barrel-vaulted churches. In Persia the monuments are less conspicuous than those in farther Mohammedan lands: there are no world-famous exhibits to rival the mosques of Cairo, or the Alhambra in Spain, or, in the other direction, the Taj Mahal in India.

It is well established that Syrian and Persian artisans went out on the heels of the Arabian conquerors, to the far corners of the empire. Their local influences modified architectural expression, though seldom turning a large building away from the basic vaulted construction and the concentration of decorative effect upon the rich—often incredibly rich, *inung*. It is this double idiom that is most typical of Islam: the plainly finished but rhythmic-

cally pleasing exterior, with domes, rounded halls, and accenting minarets, and contrasting lavishly ornamented interior walls and courts

In Persia the early buildings have rarely survived even in a ruined condition. The Mogul invasions in the thirteenth century were disastrous, wiping out not only individual monuments but entire cities. It was partly the savage sacking of the country that caused artists and craftsmen to flee in numbers to other lands, where Mohammedanism was still the religion but under independent dissident governments, particularly Spain and Egypt.

Of Persia's determining influence, one building is eloquent. The remaining portions of the Masjid Sheikh Luft Ullah in Ispahan—though out of line chronologically—are instructive as illustrating the purest exterior forms of Islamic architecture and, in the "opened" sections, where ruins have been cut away and the skeleton exposed, the usually concealed engineering features.

In passing through Syria, so to speak, on the way to Cairo, it is worth while to recall momentarily the strange history of this land where the roads of trade, religion, and military conquest had so often and so confusingly crossed and recrossed. Partly out of its own history, partly out of Persian example, Syria had contributed to the establishment of the type-form of the early Christian church. The local development had gone on, too, with the maturer Byzantine, so that some historians say that at the time of the taking of Syria for Islam, the invaders found Byzantine buildings ready to hand. In any case here as in Egypt Christian halls were adapted by the Moslems with the necessary *mihrab*, or niche toward Mecca, added.

But it is at Cairo that one comes upon the mosque in its truest example and atmosphere. Here are the great rectangular halls surmounted by domes, bare outside except for the occasional clustered arches. Sometimes the dome exterior above the drum is encrusted with a simple but intricate patterning.

One can trace in surviving Egyptian mosques indeed, the whole history of Islamic architectural forms, from the early rudimentary sanctuary, derived from Christian churches or chapels taken by chance and rebuilt with colonnades added on the side of the hall or court toward Mecca to the fullest expression, to the elaborated structure in which a rich ornamentalism spreads not only to such features as the *mihrab*, the pulpit, and the tribune, but over large areas of interior wall, door, and window-grill. It is probable that the pointed arch developed locally, out of contact of the invading style with Coptic Egyptian art.

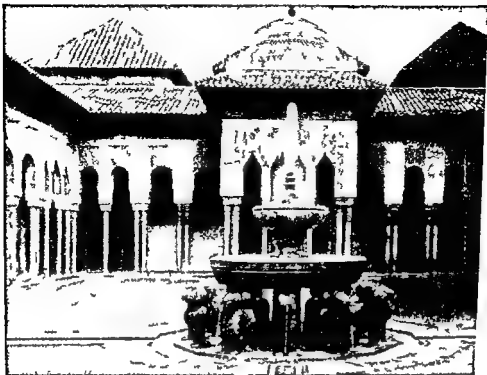
The Mosque of Sultan Hassan in Cairo built in the mid-fourteenth cen-



Exceptionally decorated mosque and minaret at Kait Bey, near Cairo

tury, is an example of the elaborated religious edifice, in this case with school facilities added. It has the immense built up portal, and four great pointed arches echo its opening where the arms of the cross open into the central court. A fountain of ornamental architectural design marks the focal point of the court. The Eastern or sanctuary recess or arm (the mosque proper) is, exceptionally, the one part ornamented riotously, in truest Moslem fashion.

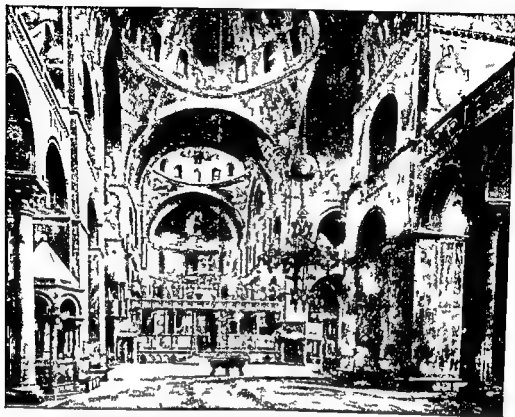
The magnificence in decoration is better seen perhaps in less complex structures. At Kait Bey outside Cairo is a cemetery group known as the "Tombs of the Caliphs," dating from the times of the later Mamelukes, about the fifteenth century. There the characteristic domed buildings exist in purest form. In the combination tomb-mosque of Sultan Kait Bey the simple outlines persist but all surfaces are lavishly decorated. The arabesque



Court of the Lions the Alhambra Granada

areas on wall and window grille and dome the stalactite ornamentation on minaret and portal archway the crenellated wall and the general aspect of rich carving and encrustation—all this finds illustration in the one building. There are too the idioms of the horseshoe arch the striped walls of alternating dark and light stone the mosaicked niches and colour added by marble veneering by glass windows and by stucco inlaid with more precious substances.

As the Mohammedans pushed across Northern Africa they built in their own manner leaving such monuments as the famous Mosque of Kairwan in Tunis. But it was in Spain that Islamic architecture reflowered with its Eastern richness not only preserved but pushed to a new summit of lavish decorativeness. For a time the Spanish Visigothic and Byzantine forms persisted in combination with those of the invading style. Older buildings were



St Mark's Church Venice interior Example of Eastern opulent decoration brought to the West by Byzantine Christians not the Mohammedans [A derson photo]

torn down so that the columns capitals and stone blocks might be used in construction of mosques and government buildings At Cordoba the Great Mosque begun in 786 but enlarged many times is less a building erected by traditional or logical plan than a record of compromise between a sought effect and available materials or existent walls Nevertheless the encrusted ornamentation and added features give it an Oriental appearance.

The Alhambra at Granada is the greatest of Moslem palaces It is a complex of open courts colonnades halls and rooms bewildering in extent and in variety The structural forms are logical enough and fairly pleasing but ornamentation as such has run away with the architecture Intricacy and delicacy of pattern have never elsewhere in Europe been so beautifully exploited There is an unparalleled series of sumptuously embellished halls

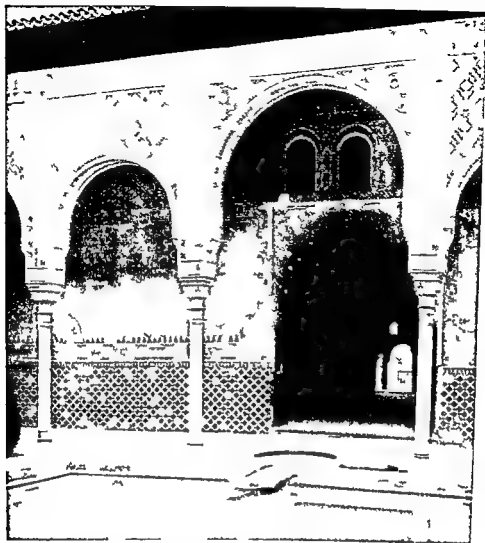
The courts are arcaded, the floors are of marquetry, every doorway and window is elaborated into a marvellously contrived show of artistry. The whole takes on an air of fancifulness, is like a fairyland in which the realities of life are unknown—though the exterior is as grim and fortresslike as that of any medieval castle.

The Court of the Lions, the Hall of the Two Sisters, the Hall of the Ambassadors, the Court of the Myrtles, and the baths are widely known in description and illustration. They touch an ultimate point in what the Western observer is likely to appraise as "romantic" architecture. To suggest that it is all dignified and well-considered art would be to over-praise. It is generally accepted, however, as one of the most charming and seductive displays of "light" architecture in world history.

Meier-Graefe sums up eloquently another view of Islamic architecture, that of the purist, when he writes in *Pyramid and Temple*: "No mosque allows you to forget that it is a travesty of a church. The nature of a mosque is incompatible with our [Christian] architecture, it sweetens and softens forms whose charm lies in their acerbity." Again he exclaims: "Not the faintest idea of the functions of a column. Everything structural turned to ornament", and "The Arabic style was marked out as the perfect decoration for Turkish baths."

The great German critic was comparing the Islamic monuments with the Egyptian pyramids, which was perhaps a bit unfair. When we are not immediately concerned with the profound types of building, there would seem to be a place in appreciation for the opulent ornamental sort too, so long as the manifestation has its own unity and integrity, in relation to intention, technique, and materials.

A wider and perhaps more modern criticism accepts the appraisal that, within its own type and purpose, Mohammedan decorative art is authentically beautiful—as, certainly, it is incomparably rich, delicate, and varied. The Spanish adventure of the Moslems ended after some centuries, in retreat. The architecture of mosque and encrusted palace has remained alien among the buildings of Western Europe. But the West retains a heritage from the Moslems that might be sought in hidden influences or discovered patently in examples of the minor arts, particularly in pottery, textiles, and metal-ware. The Hispano-Moresque wares constitute perhaps the most prized type of ceramic art known to Europe, and there were derivative products in Italy, most notably those named *maiolica*.



Islamic ornament detail from the Hall of the Ambassadors  
the Alhambra Granada

The Mohammedans then carrying forward a Persian opulence of expression created on their own ground a great body of rich and seductive art and they also influenced the decorative ideals of Europe in a gift discounted and undervalued until recreated during the long Renaissance and neo-classic era but now again recognized and counted a corrective—for something of the arabesque was needed in the too stark too restrained decorative practice of the West

The Islamic manifestation is a phase of that art which had had the Luristan bronzes as its first expression, which went on to the Sassanian brocades and silverwares, and then to the Rhages bowls and the lustre tiles. It flowered differently, perhaps more superficially, in the arabesques and encrustation of Cairo and Granada. But there was to the end something in it of the Iranian method of embedding a vigorous dominant motive within an opulent field of pattern.



## *Barbarians, Monks and Knights, and the Art Called Romanesque*

IT USED to be that every chapter about Romanesque art—about, that is, the first named Christian art of the West—was fitted with a frontispiece showing the portal of St Trophime at Arles. It was thought that the wide round arch, the symmetrical disposition of incidental columns and pilasters, and the profusion of built-in sculpture afforded an index to this “style”—which has been, at the hands of various authorities, (1) denied existence, (2) hailed as the peer of Gothic, (3) hailed as the triumph of the Roman tradition over barbarian and Oriental incursions, and (4) hailed as the triumph of barbarian and Oriental creative impulse over the run-out Roman tradition.

There was a time when the present writer, gone to live for a season at Arles, passed St Trophime day after day, and he studied the porch and portal, and got to wondering how this building—derived, if the name signifies, out of Rome—came by the vigorous decorative animals, so inevitably suggesting a connexion with Persia or, farther back, with Altai-Iran, and the panels of sculpture in almost Indian profusion, and the typical “fat” Byzantine rounding of the garmented figures. There puzzlingly too were the split columns right out of Rome, and the acanthus, even an egg-and-dart moulding folded into the arabesque-like tympanum-border.

The truth is that the Europe of the time covered by Romanesque, say from the sixth to the early twelfth century, was a battleground of warring cultures or, in the peaceful interims, a crossroads of trade routes and rival religious currents, and a prime meeting-ground of mutually alien aesthetic aptitudes.

The people of the countries above Italy were those generically known as barbarians. Although they were being gradually Christianized, and doubtless would, if they could, have embraced the arts as well as the religion of Rome, once they became enlightened, their instinctive ways of expression were

those of their Northern and Eastern motherlands, utterly different from anything in the Græco-Roman tradition. Through one half of Europe the Latin tongue prevailed as the basis for new dialects. This is the one valid reason for the name "Romanesque", although the territory ultimately Teutonic is as large as that wherein the Romance languages are spoken.

In any case, to continue to define Romanesque as "the art of Romanized Europe" is, on stylistic and racial grounds, unsound and misleading. As archaeological evidence accumulates as the West escapes from the classic obsession and accepts the validity of Oriental forms, it becomes progressively clearer that in the Dark and Middle Ages it was the barbarian and Eastern art impulses that dominated and all but submerged the Latin.

The Northern peoples continued to practise sporadically their formalized crafts and they treasured as of their own sort, the works borne in from Byzantium—the figured silks, ivories, enamels, metals. Finally, in a fusion of Gothic and Teutonic elements with Byzantine and Syrian and Persian, the accent and stamp of Rome are wellnigh lost, except in an occasional moulding or capital or realistic interpolation. Not until the Italian scholars of the dawning Renaissance triumph in central Italy will the tide of European art be turned again into Roman ways to the rational classic manner of building, to the realistic, informal, documentary grooves of "typical Western" painting and sculpture.

Meanwhile, within the development still called Romanesque, there is historic reason for recognizing that the animals of St Trophime, and of Vézelay and Souillac and Beaulieu, have more affinity with those of Siberia, and thus of China, than with anything out of Athens or Alexandria or Rome. The round arches and certain sculptural motives and rhythms, moreover, as seen in St. Ambrogio in Milan, at Poitiers, at Brunswick, even in the crypt and a porch at Canterbury Cathedral, may as easily be of the Near Oriental as of the Western persuasion.

It is these long-fugitive elements and motives and symbols, hidden under the Romanesque name, that have recently brought Romanesque art into a place of prime significance in the history of European culture. One might almost say that until recently historians had treated Romanesque art as a door-mat to the Gothic. Today it is considered, on its own account, one of the richest fields of exploration and enjoyment in all European art. The name "Romanesque" is likely to persist, inadequate as it obviously is, the confusion of motives and sources remains, but there is opened an exciting new experi-

ence of art in the popular rediscovery of such monuments as Vézelay, Autun, and Souillac. Nor is the reawakened interest in Norman art, from Sicily to Britain, unconnected with the same shifting of critical values and of appreciation.

If the confusion continues, it is not for lack of willing theorists who simplify the history of the period at a stroke. As regards Christian painting and the representational arts there is a legend that it all follows down logically from Saint Luke. As Rossetti put it:

Give honour unto Luke Evangelist,  
For it was he (the aged legends say)  
Who first taught art to fold her hands and pray  
She looked through these to God and was God's priest

Thence, no doubt, the impulse went direct to the painters of the catacomb walls, thence to the muralists of the basilicas, and so into later Christian culture. It is pretty and suggestive—but utterly conjectural and unreliable.

On the other hand, as regards architecture and sculpture, there is a school of historians willing to dismiss all the art of the Dark and Middle Ages as merely tentative and preparatory, until the French genius suddenly unifies it and teaches it the magnificent gesture by which it raises all eyes to God. There are even those who would add the best of Romanesque to Gothic (a name also imprecise, meaning merely "barbarous") and then rename the whole development "the French style." This simplification, like the other, seems to demand a blindness to realities. Whatever the European Christian art of the medieval centuries may or may not be called, it will remain a thing of mixed ancestry, changing aspect, and fused styles. But within the confused web of it is beauty, distinctive and appealing.

The peoples who overran Europe in the centuries during the decline of classic Rome, who sacked the Holy City as early as 410 and as late as 1084, were *racially* the stuff of which the present-day inhabitants of Middle and Northern Europe were to be made. It is well to examine their arts as the first background fabric of Romanesque culture. These barbarians, of whom the names Goths, Teutons, Franks, Germans, Lombards, are used to indicate a generic likeness or special divisions, brought art aptitudes of their own, but being less settled they seldom ventured into the truly monumental arts. From the forest lands, they would naturally build in perishable wood. Not centred in per-

manent home-regions—having, perhaps, the persisting nomad instinct—they had no appreciable sculpture in stone. The most that we have of theirs, for appreciation today, is in jewellery, weapons, and ceremonial objects, chiefly in precious metals.

In a chapter on "Germanic or Barbarian Art" in his *History of Art* Pijoan, who has made a special study of this field, includes illustrations of the votive crown of Recceswinth, Chilperic's sword, the crown and appended cross of Theodolinde, Theodoric's cuirass, and the so-called "iron cross" of the Lombards, to which are added various golden fibulae, baskets, vases, crosses, and bracelets, along with some later architectural reliefs identified as Visigothic and Merovingian.

The most illuminating fact brought away from an examination of these relics is that the Frankish Chilperic and the Visigothic Recceswinth and the Lombard Queen Theodolinde spoke one language of art. The aspect of all the crowns and weapons and Christian crosses is of the sort we have come to speak of as Oriental. The typical patterning is of the Eastern rich all-over sort, and incidental animal figures are in the vigorous steppe-art tradition. There is evident a great range of cultural stages, the use-values of the objects would indicate stages of social organization from wandering tribe to ceremonial court, and the several provenances of the finds, from Hungary to Ireland, from Scandinavia to Spain, indicate successive tides of immigration and extensive diffusion. There is nevertheless the generic likeness, the general non-Latin aspect.

The most probable explanation is that the barbarians of Europe, in the time of Byzantine Christianity in the East and Rome's struggle to become the seat of Christian power in the West, were of a single racial stock that had pushed westward from the Russian and Siberian plains, through the Danubian gateway in the south and across Poland in the north, and that back in the Scythian homeland certain basic elements of art-expression had been early fixed. Germanic and Visigothic and Celtic or Gallic workmanship and design seem to indicate a common origin with the Scytho-Iranian or Persian style, which had so strongly affected both Byzantine and Moslem art.

Indeed, if in Europe and the Near East there can be marked two main streams of art practice and art principle, one would be the Græco-Roman or classic, tending constantly to rationalism and realism, and to an idealism based on observation of the natural, the other the Persian or Oriental, careless of reproductive reality, ornamentally formalized, richly decorative.



Two spear ornaments, from a grave at Vermand, France, 4th century  
*[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

Romanesque art was a meeting-ground of these two world-currents the sluggishly surviving classic impulse, and the stream of non-realistic decorative art. Within the latter flow, two currents originally from the same source but long separated were coming together the stream of Byzantine arts from the Eastern into the Western Christian empire, and the native racial art still practised by the Northern barbarians. The Germanic craftsmen are essentially brothers of the Persian and Syrian Byzantine artists who meet them in the Christian West.

Most of the barbarian relics justly so named date from about A.D. 350 to the end of the seventh century. These were manufactured by the still untamed invaders the uncivilized attackers of Rome. In the Metropolitan Museum of New York there is a collection of their safety-pins and rings and brooches and earrings, together with parts of weapons and scabbards. The motives are geometrical and near-abstract. The method is that of dividing the object into "fields" of flattened relief. There are, of course, many routine utilitarian objects not too expertly designed. But there are also exceptional trinkets and ornaments that have the vigour and decorative richness of near-primitive, non-intellectual adornment.

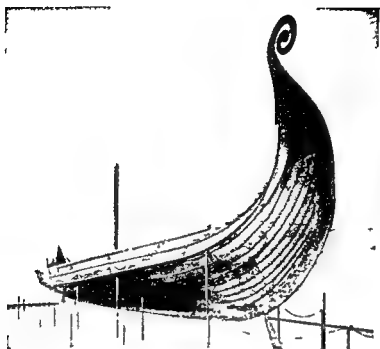
A set of spear ornaments in gilt-finished silver, recovered from a fourth-century grave at Vermand in France, indicates a craftsman's impulse or tradition closely akin to that of the Viking wood-carvers and—in the floriations that escape identification with any real flower—the Irish. There are similar metal objects, designed vigorously, and with the characteristic all-over patterning, from points in Germany, Austria, the Balkan states, and Scandinavia. There are pins and pendants, bracelets and chains, pocket-ornaments and buckles.

There were two outstanding developments of pre-Romanesque art in Northern Europe which dispel a little the diffuse impression afforded by the crafts of the shifting and scattered barbarian tribes. In Scandinavia the Viking civilization has left monuments finely decorative, and obviously related to the Eastern source-art, and in Ireland the distinctive Celtic relics are stylistically reminiscent of the same origins, but more eloquent of a settled and independently creative civilization. Some authorities insist that both bodies of art are survivals of Neolithic cultures that cannot, on any evidence in hand, be connected racially with the Germanic barbarians. Others hold that the Celtic culture, superseding the general late Stone Age culture, of which the Swiss lake-dweller tribes were the most memorable part, marked an Eastern-Iranian invasion preceding the Germanic, and of the same stock. Certainly the motives and methods found in the art-works would seem to confirm the theory of one Iranian source. In any case the Norse or Scandinavian development and the Irish are outstanding, are notably alike, and in turn have affinity with the later Gothic and Frankish expressions.

The Norsemen or Normans, the Vikings of Norway and Denmark, were known unfavourably at every seaport from the Baltic Sea to Gibraltar and Palermo. Their piratical exploits and their invasions changed history in England, Ireland, France, Spain, and Sicily. Their early art is best known in connexion with the ships that made the sea forays possible. For the Viking chiefs were by custom buried in their galleys. Two of the vessels have been unearthed. The richly carved keel of one of these (now in a museum at Oslo) is ornamented with the intertwined forms, geometrically spaced but expressive of vigorous animal life, which came from the East. The larger decorative form of the ships moreover, links with the tradition of the Iranian steppe-peoples.

One need but trace the virile outline of the prow, and one has the spirited contour for which so much else was sacrificed in the Luristan bronzes, the Ordos figures, and the Persian textile-motives. It is the virile, formalized line that was eased out of Greek art, in favour of symmetrical masses and observed natural detail and refined finish. It is eloquent of the craftsman's approach, the decorative intent, as against the representational and the realistic.

What is oftener known as Norman art is the architecture of a later period which emerged after the Northmen had settled in Western France (still



The Oseberg ship Oslo Museum

[Photo, courtesy Swedish Travel Information Bureau]

"Normandy") Going from there to England, they took with them a Norman-Romanesque way of building, but this is better treated as a part of the story of Romanesque architecture, which will have a place later in the chapter

The Celtic art of Ireland affords one of the most enjoyable episodes in the early history of Europe. The architectural monuments are in ruins, but the stone crosses are often intact except for the more delicate detail. The best of them are unique in form, strong and simple in outline and mass, and extraordinarily rich with abstract and figured sculpture. They are not gravestones but celebrative monuments, often dedicated to saints. Some of the panels with figures are scenes of Christian legendry. Perhaps there converge in the crosses elements of the old Celtic stone-worship and the iconography of the Christian Church.

The proportioning of the shaft to the base and to the actual circled cross is often masterly. No less masterly is the way in which the surfaces are panelled off and each filled with a composition decorative on its own account but contri-

torians have made a special subdivision of Gallo-Roman relics, of the early time when Rome actually did subjugate, or make peace with, the barbarian peoples, particularly in France. More confusing are the mixing currents in Spain, where the Visigothic gradually gave way to the Byzantine (rather than the Roman), only to be inundated by the Moslem, then to succumb gradually to the full-matured Romanesque and the Gothic as brought over the Pyrenees from France.

Farther north, where the Germanic or Frankish peoples were separating into two language groups, which were later to give outline to the present French and German nations, with Flemish, Dutch, and Swiss connexions, there was a less confused intermingling. By the time of the Merovingian kings, just before Charlemagne, the Byzantine and Roman conjuncture with Germanic elements can be visibly traced in individual works. Basically, in church building, the basilica of the Western church was adopted, along with Byzantine ideas of decorative enrichment. Under Charlemagne the various forces were finally brought into some sort of focus. It is from "the Carolingian renaissance" that historians date the entry of the French spirit into European art.

The Northern barbarians had had no architecture of their own. Roman writers mention the lack of cities and towns, and the comparatively mean nature of the scattered houses—when they were not caves. After the so-called pacification of Gaul, and the building of Roman cities in the "provinces" of Northern Europe, the withdrawal of the Romans saw their cities more or less abandoned. The medieval castles on the hill-tops along the Rhone and the Rhine are symbolic of what happened. The barbarian, even when enlightened and wealthy, wanted isolation. The monasteries, particularly those of the Irish, were then the truer homes of settled culture.

When a chief became a king, and needed a court from which to direct larger affairs, he must therefore draw upon the more established civilizations, and it was here that each ruler had to make an important choice. Should the models be Roman or Byzantine?

In the late fifth century the Ostrogoth Theodoric, having conquered Italy and having become, in the absence of any other, "King of Rome," setting up a court in Ravenna, adopted for his palace the Byzantine style, which had been acclimated there during the rule of the Western exarchs. On the other hand when Theodoric thought about his tomb he decided it should be like those of the great Roman emperors, and the imported Roman architects did



their best to supply their new barbarian king with a noble classic monument. This tomb at Ravenna is a remarkable and an instructive compromise, somehow heavily Roman in aspect, yet touched faintly with the rich ornament that might be Germanic or Byzantine. The builders had lost the Roman knowledge of dome-construction and had not yet mastered the Eastern, so they imported an immense single stone slab and rounded the top to look like a built-up dome.

When it came Charlemagne's turn to set up a court, from which he was to rule the Frankish territories, he chose Aix-la-Chapelle (now Aachen) as his capital. His subjects were then, to put it as accurately as one can, more or less Christianized. But when he drew a circle of advisers around him, wanting perhaps Christians but not Romans, he chose an Irish bishop, a Visigothic bishop from Spain, lately driven out by the Moslems, and sundry German supporters. Whatever these counsellors may have contributed to the execution of Charlemagne's dream and plan to revive artistic as well as political glory, in the re-forming Holy Roman Empire, it would be Byzantium to which all would look for models.

And indeed the chapel in Charlemagne's palace at Aix is after the plan of St Vitale in Ravenna—a complex of arches and vaults around a domed central hall. The columns were actually brought from Rome and Ravenna, with the Pope's permission, and the mosaicists who set out to enrich the walls in the Eastern fashion are supposed to have been called from Constantinople. Charlemagne could not write, perhaps could not read, and his advisers, coming from the Church, the one remaining treasury and fountain of learning, naturally shaped his artistic tastes as well as his theology and politics, but he kept his authority too, changing the wording of the orthodox creed, collecting the old Frankish songs (later to be destroyed as pagan by his son and successor Louis the Pious), and ordering such works of art and furnishings as his fancy dictated.

After the loss of Italy to the barbarians, the papacy at Rome had been re-established, but had continued only on the sufferance of the Byzantine emperors. Now, by Charlemagne's alliance with the Pope, the Western church was able to defy the Eastern power and at the same time rid itself of the threat of some still unsubjugated barbarian remnants. It is to be doubted if Rome at this time retained any considered allegiance to classic art as distinguished from Byzantine Latin Catholicism, after the abandonment of Italy, had practically died, and had re-stemmed from Byzantium. In any case, when the

buting to the total lavish ornamental effect. If we had not become familiar with the crosses in their Irish setting, we should be likely, upon a first meeting, to mark the intent as Oriental, the decorative manner as un-Western.

There are other Irish relics as distinctively out of the cycle one would expect. The reliquary of St. Patrick's bell is a rather sophisticated expression of the earlier abstract patterning and floriations. The bronze and gold brooches vary from those simple in form and sparingly decorated to extremely involved examples like the celebrated Tara Brooch, of the seventh century, with its elaborated outlines and intricately adorned surfaces. The ornamentation is of the sort that seems derived from the plant world but strictly reduced to abstract tracery.

There is a return to simplified forms in the Ardagh Chalice, in which the extensive areas of plain silver are played against rich bands of interlaced patterning on gold, studded with accenting enamel beads. There are many other ritual objects that testify to the Irish love of opulent ornamentation and to the persistence of the Celtic type of decoration—crosses, crosiers, book-clasps, and ceremonial vessels.

From these one might go on to the illuminated manuscripts produced at the monasteries. The famous *Book of Kells* is one of the most elaborate examples, and the decorations from its pages afford the type examples of Celtic ornament most often reproduced.

It is a temptation to linger over the episode of Irish art, for its story forms one of the most fascinating chapters in the cultural annals of the peoples of the British Isles. It is replete with romantic figures—not the least that of St. Patrick, who wisely founded Irish Christianity partly upon the learning and organization of the Druids—who, legend says, dropped the sombre habiliments of Rome to ride in white clothes behind two white stags, and who encouraged the continuation of Northern art.

There is something appropriate in the legend that St. Patrick used a bell given him by the Pope to call the Irish people together, and to help him charm them away from other religions. There is another legend to the effect that he threw a clanging bell into the midst of an unresponsive and hostile group of the barbarians and thus frightened them into submission. The Irish still treasure five bells reputedly Patrick's.

It is said that symbols of the pre-Celtic civilization survived in the circle of huge stones around the early Irish monasteries, reminiscent of the cromlechs or menhirs of the Stone Age sanctuaries. That Ireland should have be-



Irish sculptured cross, Drumcliffe  
[Françoise Henry: *La Sculpture Irlandaise*]

come at one time the only settled home, even the refuge, of Christian faith and education in Europe, in those ages when barbarians were fighting Christians for possession of France and Germany and surrounding territory, and even devastating Italy itself; that it should have carried the torch, even while practising its own vigorous and distinctive crafts without giving an inch to Roman art, is one of those happy incidents too rare in history.

Just where barbarian art stops and Romanesque—including-barbarian begins no one can venture to say. There are many sorts of borderline example. His-

torians have made a special subdivision of Gallo-Roman relics, of the early time when Rome actually did subjugate, or make peace with, the barbarian peoples, particularly in France. More confusing are the mixing currents in Spain, where the Visigothic gradually gave way to the Byzantine (rather than the Roman), only to be inundated by the Moslem, then to succumb gradually to the full-matured Romanesque and the Gothic as brought over the Pyrenees from France.

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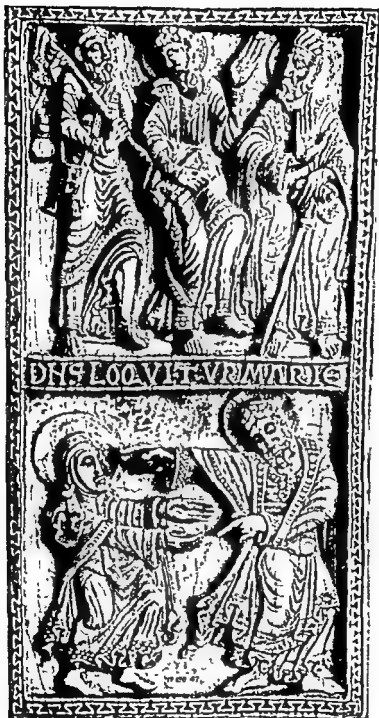
Pope in 800 set a crown on Charlemagne's head and gave Church sanction to his position as successor of the Cæsars and Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the event tended to stabilize Europe politically but did not change established trends in the arts

The Emperor's architect built, beside the structures at Aix-la Chapelle—soon called "the new Rome"—a number of buildings in Germany. Charlemagne's bishops and lieutenants, too, encouraged the arts and crafts throughout the empire. At Cividale, near Udine, in Italy, there are church decorations that are not only rewarding intrinsically but instructive as indicating a mingling of Byzantine, Irish Germanic, and Roman influences.

The feudal system in some measure explains the diversity continuing through the following two centuries. Petty kingdoms and principalities, even local overlords with small castle-courts and bands of vassals, resisted the central or imperial authority. In the eleventh century France still was a patchwork of practically independent polities. Normandy, Aquitaine, Burgundy, Flanders, etc. This was not yet an age of local initiative, but a time of cross ing currents, as is indicated further by the marriage of Otto III, German Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, to a Byzantine princess, and his importation of numbers of Byzantine artists and craftsmen to found schools and workshops.

The religion of the time affects art expression fundamentally, and indeed one can scarcely understand Romanesque culture without recalling the function of the monasteries as refuges of learning and workshops of art, without recalling too, the constant come-and-go of far-travelling pilgrims, and their of crusaders. The widespread and worshipful treasuring of sacred relics led to a ceaseless movement of the devout back and forth across the Roman Empire and as far east as the Holy Lands. The procession of worshippers meant continual circulation of the diverse currents of the empire, and especially a flood of relics, gifts, and spoils from Byzantium and the Asian holy cities. A little later the same spirit led to the building of churches and cathedrals out of all proportion in size to the needs of local worshippers. Of course the architectural glorification of God—the building of a house for the Divine Spirit and a treasury for sacred objects—called for something monumental, but a more practical consideration was that the structure would need to shelter vast numbers of pilgrims.

The first monasteries to become centres of art production were Egyptian



Ivory carving: leaf of diptych, Spain, 12th century  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

and Syrian. The Copts were perhaps the earliest to bring the ascetic element into Christianity. Asceticism is an element of the Eastern rather than the Western spiritual faiths. It had been practised by the Hindus, before Buddha, and to a limited extent by bands of Jews. It was natural that the Asiatic and Egyptian Christians should be the first to withdraw into sacred communal retreats. The libraries and studios of Alexandria, with the tradition of Hellenism persisting, doubtless had much to do with the formation of the schools of scribes within the newly formed monastic establishments.

In the West the monastic system took firm root with the establishment of a series of monasteries under Benedict. After completing his own period of mortification in a hair-shirt, within a cave-retreat on a rocky precipice, he turned back to more practical Western ways of demonstrating Christian piety. In the early sixth century he was already directing a chain of a dozen monasteries in Southern Italy, and insisting upon a gospel that included, along with faith, brotherhood and charity and a regimen of hard work. The brothers who did not go out on missions to convert the pagans—practically all the nearest neighbours were heirs to the late Roman cults—were constrained to labour within the monastery walls. The perpetuation of learning and the practice of the arts and crafts constituted a major activity of the inmates.

The central Benedictine monastery at Monte Cassino, south of Rome, became a refuge for all of Western Christianity. It was at times a lonely asylum, during the troubled period when Rome itself was repeatedly sacked and lost to the unlettered barbarians. Within a half-century of Benedict's death one of the Benedictine monks had become Pope—Gregory the Great—and had been instrumental in establishing the Benedictine order through large parts of Europe. The Irish monasteries were linked with the Italian centre, and it was the Irish Benedictines who stood firmest for Christ and Rome, when political chaos and intellectual darkness had come on the Continent.

In Italy, Cassiodorus was greatest of the early monastic leaders. He particularly set up treasures and schools and craftsrooms. Perhaps his Syrian ancestry and his patrician derivation had something to do with his reverence for the intellectual and artistic heritage of mankind. He is said to have founded the first monastery devoted exclusively to the transcription of manuscripts.

The art work of the monks was, of course, directed into those channels which led to glorification of God and the spiritual enlightenment of mankind. Copying and embellishment of the holy books came first. But under a broad-minded superior the manuscripts might extend to lay works over on



the borders of science and philosophy. And the immediate church arts—particularly when popes and bishops had fallen heir to the titles and traditions of emperors—could be carried to the most elaborate and sumptuous expressions in goldsmithing, ivory-carving, and vestment-embroidery. Yet it is significant, on the other side, that what is traditionally known in the book arts as “monastic binding” is the sort tooled without gold.

Toward the end of monastic leadership in the arts, in the early eleventh century, Suger, Abbot of St. Denis, defending himself against charges of worldliness brought by St. Bernard, was to write a line that well sums up the case for the craftsmen in the monasteries. From being scholar and craftsworker he had become head of the abbey and a national ecclesiastical and political leader. He exclaimed: “If the ancient law ordained that cups of gold should be used for libations and to receive the blood of rams—how much rather should we devote gold, precious stones, and the rarest of metals to those vessels destined to hold the blood of Our Lord!” This was the spirit in which gold-workers fashioned chalices and ritual crosses, candelabra and reliquaries.

Cassiodorus himself in his writings expressed something of the spirit in which the copyists in the scriptoria worked. The monk, he says, “may fill his mind with the Scriptures while copying the sayings of the Lord, with his fingers he gives life to men and arms against the wiles of the devil, as the antiquarius copies the word of Christ, so many wounds does he inflict on Satan. What he writes in his cell will be carried far and wide over distant provinces.” If he happened to be a trained and gifted artist as well, he carried on the world traditions of aesthetic expression, even while thus finding satisfaction in a consecrated task.

The manuscript illuminations or illustrations comprise a miniature history of Christian representational art. Here can be traced the beginnings and development of style and method, of icon and symbol. The whole cycle of change, from Greek-influenced picturing, through crystallizing Byzantine formalism, and into the varied European decorative embellishment, may be instanced in a well-chosen collection of manuscript illuminations. The highly stylized practice is followed by frank illustration, which becomes photographic, then is touched with fantasy and the grotesque, the realist’s substitutes for naïveté and formalism.

From the pageant-like changing pages can be selected some of the most spirited and enjoyable miniature paintings in all human history. Each il-

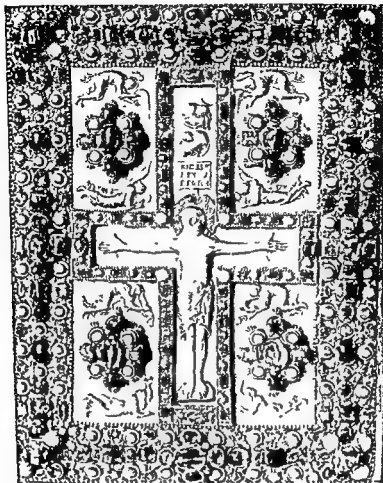
illumination *was* a painting, though then as always the greater portion of painters copied or adapted from a few true masters among them, and the creation of a single manuscript and its illustrations and decorations might consume many years of a miniaturist's time.

In the early Christian manuscripts may be found perfect analogues of Roman and Hellenistic painting, of the Pompeian house paintings and the catacomb murals. All the exactitudes and weaknesses of the realistic illustrator are here. These things may be left to archaeologists and scholars. But soon one finds the decorative impulse gaining ascendancy. The Oriental method gradually replaces the classic. The scenes are laid out without background, the figures are formalized, and almost throughout the thousand-year history of Christian illumination the two Oriental canons prevail: rich bordering floriation and richly ornamented panels, and a neglect of "the natural realities" of the human form and all representational elements in favour of plastic aliveness and rigid stylization.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries marked the height of achievement in Byzantium and in the monasteries of near-by lands. Then the Iconoclast controversy burst over the Eastern Church, and Constantinople forbade all imaging. The Western Church, however, carried on Christian iconography and illustration, in the method already set in the Eastern lands. Indeed it is supposed that great numbers of the monk-artists then deserted the Byzantine monasteries of Greece and Syria to escape the prohibition, joining the chapters of their orders in the West.

During the centuries that follow there are tentative and at times notable thrusts toward realistic documentation, but they are the exceptional, not the typical thing, up to the thirteenth century. In the miniatures as in metal-working the stream of influence out of the East, when it had gone from Egypt and Syria to Byzantium and thence to the monasteries that gave political allegiance to the reconstructed Roman authority, met that other stream from the north, bearing influences from the original Iranian Asiatic source. Thus the Irish formalized ornament found perfect understanding and acceptance among monk-artists accustomed to the ways of the Asiatic scriptoria.

For full appreciation of the miniatures one should have an eye as emancipated from photographic necessities as that demanded for enjoyment of Chinese landscapes or Persian miniatures. An early work like the *Gospel of Rossano*, a Syrian or possibly Egyptian manuscript in Greek, of the sixth century, is not yet crystallized into the full Byzantine formalism (or "stuff-



Cover of manuscript of *The Gospels* France, 9th century  
 [Courtesy Pierpont Morgan Library, New York]

ness"), but already the picturing is flat, decoratively spaced, and stripped of background and detail. The one feature of the treatment of the halo about Christ's head might be noted as indicating the unclassic approach of the artist-monk. It is a decorative scheme in itself. In the Byzantine scripts of the following centuries, the patterning instinct, which led the miniaturist to grasp every opportunity to spread a rich all-over design on Christ's or emperor's robe or on architectural column or frieze, is apparent in countless manuscripts. The other sort of formalization, which led to treatment of the representational elements in rigid stylization, is as evident in manuscripts as

in mosaics and in mural paintings of the time. Then the interest in the "natural" begins to reassert itself. There are examples at every stage of evolution from stiffened emblem-figure to almost photographic delineation. There is a lesson to be learned from that fourteenth-century English Psalter in the Morgan Library wherein actualized human beings are presented against areas of abstract patterning. A single page, moreover, bears a realistic study of a peacock and a fanciful winged figure heraldically formalized. This is at the very end of the history of illuminated manuscripts, in Gothic times.

From the miniatures as individual precious works of art, and from the vellum manuscripts as a whole, harmonizing calligraphy and decoration, one might go on to the rich bindings as worthy relics of the arts matured in the monasteries. The leather bindings with elaborate tooling are a later development, but in sumptuous jewelled book-covers, the Byzantine examples have perhaps never been surpassed. Some of the finest ivory-carvings of the Byzantine and Romanesque eras were in the form of panels to be set into book-boards.

The book-bindings, moreover, yield up numerous beautiful examples of enamelling, although this craft was incidental also to goldsmithing and the other metal arts. Enamel picture plaques were set into crosses, votive crowns, and altar-fronts. There are reliquary caskets entirely covered with gold-set enamel sheathing.

While the gorgeous Byzantine examples seem to have influenced the German and French enamellists in the middle era, the early work lacks the fire and glow of Eastern products. But there are in the European things a solemn richness and a distinctive muted harmony of colouring. The process of filling gold-fenced depressions or cloisons with the enamels is here abandoned for a less difficult and costly one known as *champlevé* in which the cells for the coloured paste are cut into a metal back and opaque enamels usually replace the translucent ones. The Western medieval enamels can be traced back, in general, to schools or crafts-shops centred at Limoges, Liege and neighbouring towns, and Cologne. A favourite type of elaborated enamel box is a casket in the form of a church building—which may remind us of the continuing close connexion of art and religion.

A diverting sidelight on the relationship of the monastic artist and the "Northern civilization" is afforded by the stories told of Bernward of Hildesheim, who became bishop in A.D. 993. From being a scholar and a craftsman he progressed to being a leading protector and patron of the arts,

in consilio impiorum: & in via pec-  
catorum non stetit: & in cathedra pe-  
nitentie non sedet.

**S**ed in lege domini uoluntas eius:  
& in lege eius meditabitur die ac nocte.

**E**t erit tanquam lignum quod plan-  
tatum est secus decursus aquarum:

and he made his German city a continuing treasury of crafts-works. He personally designed many of the sumptuous accessories and fittings of the cathedral, and the workers under his direction, particularly the goldsmiths, achieved international fame. His own cross and candlesticks are a bit on the florid side, although perpetuating the Germanic synthesis of decorative patterning and incidental vigorous animal forms. The Hildesheim appointments include straight Byzantine designs, and also some obviously transitional works, with elements of realism and a worldliness of subject-interest (even nudes) entering in. There may be a strain of ancient Roman naturalism mixing in here, for the bishop had studied the sculptures of the Eternal City.

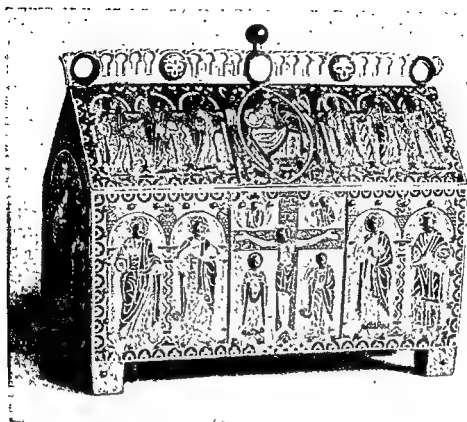
But Bernward is symbolic. In a time when the arts are still monastic and remote from common living, he gives them wider life, new civic significance. He is painter, scholar, engineer, architect, worker in precious metals, and bishop and fighter as well. He was canonized two centuries later. He is one of the few artist-saints.

Suger, Abbot of St Denis, who was born about 1081, similarly became patron of the crafts and defended the monastic artists against the charges of un-Christian lavishness in decoration. He is the better known for insisting that more French craftsmen be trained and fewer experts brought from Byzantine art centres. He too ran to magnificence and touches of free naturalism, in the monastic church he had built.

It may be only a coincidence but the traditional formalism begins to go out as art becomes secularized. Not far distant looms the time of the guilds, the lay organizations of artisans who will take the crafts, as also the theatre art, out of the hands of the Church brothers. The guilds will grow up at first within the rather precarious stability of the social structure determined by the feudal lords. At the time of Bernward and Suger, however, it is still the church rather than the palace or castle that is the protector and treasury of the arts.

Theophilus, a monk and crafts-instructor, probably of the eleventh century, wrote an encyclopaedic work on the crafts processes entitled *Upon Divers Arts*. He strove to inspire the monks with a holy zeal, exhorting them to 'believe in entire faith that the Spirit of God has filled your heart when you have adorned His house with so great beauty and so many arts'. He also assured the workers special rewards in the life to come—where artists of many ages and places have had to place their hopes of recompense.

Theophilus's instructions regarding technique and materials are often clear



Reliquary with champlevé enamel decorations. Limoges, about 1200  
*[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

and sound, though some of his instances are very strange, and his chemistry is deplorable. He is very broad in his review of the sources of his crafts knowledge, mentioning the metal-chasing of Arabia, the mosaics and enamels of Tuscany, the windows of France, and the works of "industrious Germany" in metals, wood, and stone.

The Persian-Byzantine tradition in silks and embroideries continues in the centuries of Romanesque crystallization, as one would expect in territories where imported Oriental stuffs had long been among the most prized of gifts and possessions of the wealthy and the powerful. Charlemagne was buried in a Persian shroud; sacred relics in the church treasuries are commonly wrapped in bits of rich figured embroidery; robes of bishop and king and chief are opulently decorative. Of native French or English work there is

one that transcends all other surviving examples the so-called Bayeux Tapestry. It embraces a series of seventy-two connected pictures of the Norman Conquest of England, embroidered on a strip of linen 231 feet in length and twenty inches in width. The drawing is spirited and posteresque, and the whole uniquely effective as formal design.

It is likely that the architects who went to Ravenna to do Theodoric's bidding in the sixth century considered themselves privileged Romans, temporarily deposed, if not Roman nobles. Their art was secular. When Charlemagne built in the ninth century, his architects were servants of the Church, and important European architecture for six centuries following was destined to be ecclesiastical. Romanesque architecture is essentially an art of the Christian Church.

Romanesque is a heavy style. It confesses outwardly the thickness of its walls. The thrust of its vaults led to buttressing either by masses of stone or by side-buildings, laterally disposed. In this the style goes back to those pre-Byzantine churches of Christian Persia and Mesopotamia and Syria, of which the cruciform domed structure was an outgrowth. Byzantium played with the form, did daring feats in spreading the dome over complexes of arches, vaults, and apses. Islam had its turn at elaborating and decorating the type. But in France, and thus in England and Germany, the Christian church building turned serious, took something from old Rome, and built heavily on the soil, then became, in a sudden burst of creativeness on the part of the builders, a new expression of man's aspiration and imagination.

Italy had long been barbarian, too, at the dawning of the eleventh century, and Lombard Italy poured into France some of the energy that brought about the Romanesque efflorescence in stone. It is necessary to remember always the continuous streams of pilgrims on the roads of Europe, and particularly the network of monasteries with one spiritual and artistic outlook, from Monte Cassino to Fulda and the British communities. The Benedictine monks are a sort of international fatherhood determining the like forms of Romanesque building throughout Europe.

St. Ambrogio in Milan is a landmark in the development of Romanesque, and the more notable because a certain synthesis of lingering Roman elements and Byzantine and Germanic is indicated, even while a new and determining structural feature is involved. In a certain purity of form it is lonely among the buildings of Italy. Almost invariably the edifices elsewhere bow to





St. Ambrogio, Milan

[Photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

ancient Rome or to Byzantium in their structure, or are studies in decoration—like Pisa Cathedral—over a basilica framework. St. Ambrogio is 'pure'

There are legends, to a certain extent documented, regarding the unique mastery of vaulting on the part of the ancient brotherhood of masons, the *Magistri Comacini*, resident at Como above Milan. They invented or revived a variation of roof-structure in the groined vault. In this system the space under the more usual barrel vault is cut into squared segments by transverse arches. Each square is then covered by a vault crossed by diagonal arches or ribs. Among other results, the thrust of the vault is transferred from the lateral walls of the squares to the piers at the four corners. From this circumstance came the clustered columns of the high Romanesque and Gothic periods. There was in the ribbed vault, too, the seed of Gothic separation of structural skeleton and "skin."

The main hall of St Ambrogio is built over four main squares in the nave, sixteen minor squares in the aisles, and seven in the atrium or portico. To the credit of the Lombard architects, they externalized their novel way of building instead of concealing it. There is a frank squareness, an engaging honesty of expression, in the edifice. The enlarged piers are structurally decorative. Ornament is of the sparest. *There is a rhythmic simplicity in the arcades which is Italianate*—this feature will not go to France and England. With the lift of Norman Romanesque the lingering Southern horizontality will disappear.

It would be misleading to argue too much importance into this one church, as if there were no other Romanesque monuments in Lombardy, no major relics of eleventh- and twelfth-century building in the rest of Italy. In many parts of the marvellous Lombard country there are fascinating hunting-grounds for lovers of architecture, from the hill towns against the Alps down through the cities of the Po Valley. And farther south there are the varied achievements at Pisa, Florence (where San Miniato is especially notable), Pistoia, and Lucca. In view of the generously inclusive nature of the term "Romanesque," many of the medieval monuments in Italy might be noted as resting within the meaning either structurally or decoratively. But it is St Ambrogio that is outstanding, by reason of its originality and its vigour, its Germanic forthrightness and its Italian melodious rhythms. Especially there is the new type of vaulting. Here is implicit Italy's contribution to the flowering of a medieval architecture of the North. Perhaps, in the light of later development, St. Ambrogio should be identified rather as proto-Romanesque.

Burgundy was the first home of the French genius. From there the spirit swept into Normandy, where French sensibility crossed with Viking vigour. But the amazing thing about the eleventh-century architectural advance is the blazing rapidity with which it covered every part of the old Gallic province. The year 1000 feared by the faithful as likely to bring millennial disaster, had been safely passed. Christian enthusiasm suddenly reacted from a blighting awe and dread. Interest was shifted from the after-life to an immediate future-in-life.

There is a school of criticism that grants less influence to the Burgundians, whose claim is based on the spread of moral and æsthetic impulses from the monastery at Cluny. Earlier the scattered Benedictine abbeys had been independent, but in the tenth century a league was formed and Cluny became

the centre of authority and leadership. Soon the reborn Benedictine order held sway over a vast European territory, extending into Spain and Britain and Germany. The building of many of the greatest Romanesque churches was fostered by the monks sent out from the central abbey.

The abbey-church at Cluny, however, was destroyed during the French Revolution. It had been built, or rebuilt, in 1089, and it was then the largest church in the Western Christian empire. It is said to have been so beautiful that no mortal architect could have planned it. St Paul, according to the faithful, came in a vision to the artist-monk charged with the designing, and gave him the plans. A dissentient group of monks, led by the puritan St Bernard, established the Cistercian order, in A.D. 1098, to combat the wealth and display favoured by the Cluny authority. The Cluniac and the Cistercian bodies were thus responsible for two currents, rich and severe, ornamental and restrained.

There are classifications of the French Romanesque, based on locality, on influences brought in by varied building materials, and on the degree of independence shown in handling the type structure. Provence and Burgundy were in close affinity. (Both were on the highways from Lombardy.) Farther west, in Toulouse, Auvergne, and Aquitaine there was perhaps more of independent experiment and invention. A new logic comes clear, in large structures, and there is a greater profusion of the sculpture called by some "Germanic-Byzantine," by others merely "medieval" or "Romanesque."

An early church, Notre Dame du Port at Clermont-Ferrand, is transitional in that it combines groined vaults, over the aisles, with a nave covered by a barrel vault. The thrust of the barrel vault had to be met by flanking half-barrel vaulting over the triforium galleries (the half-stories above the aisles). Under the necessity of providing this direct buttressing, the clerestory windows were squeezed out. Part of the impulse to the development of matured Romanesque came from the desire to increase the amount of light that could be admitted, without reducing stability and safety. In St Sernin at Toulouse, one of the most impressive early medieval churches, the continuous side-thrust of the barrel vault is modified by the insertion of transverse arches at regular intervals, but there still was too little chance to pierce the heavy walls for illumination. Not until the groined vault was further tested and perfected, so that it could be used over the nave, was it possible to achieve the impressive height desired and at the same time have clerestory lighting.



Bayeux Cathedral, showing French Romanesque vaulting

[Lithograph after drawing by N-M J Chapuy, 1845, courtesy New York Public Library]

Before that consummation—that is, before the system developed at St Ambrogio in Milan was accepted in the North—there were many compromise or transitional structures. At Angoulême the cathedral was built without side-aisles, the nave was roofed by three domes, and the crossing by a fourth one, raised on a drum pierced by windows, but the main façade, decorated with heavy arcading, with corner towers added, has taken on a distinctly Romanesque aspect. St Front in Périgueux is modelled much more on the Byzantine plan—being notably like Justinian's Church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, or its derivative, St Mark's in Venice—than on Roman and Lombard lines. But its Eastern vaults and domes fail to remove it from the general category of Romanesque building. Similarly it is impossible to say how much in the façade of Notre Dame la Grande at Poitiers is Byzantine, how much Romanesque. A long series of churches, like St. Trophime

at Arles, returns toward horizontality. The structural forms and the decorative features lean toward the traditions of Italy and of Byzantium.

But the church that is considered typical "high" Romanesque has those characteristics that could develop only with the perfecting of the groined vault. A basic identifying feature of the style is the round arch. But gradually the pillars push upward under the corners of the vault—and the vertical accent that is the second distinguishing surface feature of Northern Romanesque is established. Thus comes, too, the increased aspect of mystery that is of the essence of late Romanesque and of Gothic building.

St. Etienne at Caen is perhaps the most characteristic example of that phase. The long central nave and the flanking aisles afford a basic form not too changed to remind one of the ancient Roman basilica. The addition of transept wings, a feature from the East, modifies the plan and renders it cruciform—at a meeting-point of utilitarian considerations and symbolism. There are high clerestory windows, here appearing above a second row of arches giving onto galleries over the aisles. The basilica apse area has been greatly enlarged, not only do the aisles continue around the sanctuary, in what is known as the ambulatory, but the small apses or chapels flanking them are joined in one encircling structural unit.

The interior proclaims at first glance the method of construction with groined vaults supported by clustered pillars. The arches have not yet given up their roundness, nor is there any attempt to lighten the generally "serious" effect with a profusion of ornament. The sense of mystery, of grandeur of heaviness—perhaps of a sort of impressive sorrow that derives from Christian ideology—is evoked by these round arches and sturdy piers and by the twilight atmosphere. There is more of rest, of quiet, here than in the more decorated and fragile Gothic. The Romanesque exteriors of the North, too, are comparatively plain, homely and forthright, though many, as at Caen, were later given Gothic spires.

To England the Normans carried from France the knowledge of mature Romanesque design and craftsmanship. The early English cathedrals were constructed in this style, and there were numerous Norman castles. It is said that no fewer than seven thousand churches were built in England in the century following the Norman conquest of 1066. There had been a native Anglo-Saxon architecture, which was of heavy, sturdy type, and this contributed some minor features to the new expression.

English Romanesque is usually known as Norman architecture. Durham Cathedral is the largest monument in which the original Romanesque character has persisted through later accidents and "improvements." But some of the most impressive bits of Romanesque construction are to be seen in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral, in the transepts of Winchester, in the crypt of Worcester, and in parts of Peterborough. In general the English cathedrals had longer transepts than those in the type buildings in France, and a main tower was added over the crossing.

In the German Romanesque churches there is more of the old basilica, and of surviving Carolingian features as adapted from the Byzantine by the architects who built for Charlemagne at Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle), and there is a special affinity with the Lombard forms with which the Romanesque technically began. But again diversity is a first characteristic of the churches grouped under the style name. The plentiful wood of Germany often led the architects to roof the naves with that material, and therefore there was no rapid transition toward the church marked by the idioms developed from the use of the groined vault. Nor was there an influx of Norman ecclesiastics and workers as in England. Nevertheless, the cathedrals of Worms, Mainz, and Speyer, and the Church of the Apostles at Cologne, are among the typical vaulted edifices with consistent round-arch construction. Certain minor features set off the German Romanesque from other varieties: notably plans with apses at both ends of the church and, on the exterior, a profusion of arcaded galleries and round or octagonal turrets. In Germany more markedly than elsewhere Romanesque architecture was made into something consistent, and distinct from the Byzantine on the one hand and the Gothic on the other. But as an elaborated style, as seen in the larger monuments, it is somewhat dull, with virtues that lie in the perilous realm of the picturesque. Some of the best of it in Germany is, appropriately, in "romantic" half-ruined castles. And indeed, throughout Europe the thick-walled, turreted, and almost windowless Romanesque way of building was employed for castles, forts, and city walls.

Sculpture in Europe from the beginning of the Christian era had included (1) some slight continuation of the late Græco-Roman naturalism, as seen particularly in reliefs on sarcophagi, with Jonah and the whale, Daniel and the lions, and other Christian characters treated in traditional illusionistic



Tympanum of abbey church at Vezelay, about 1130  
[Archives Photographiques]

technique this marking the final stage of decadence in the classic method, (2) Byzantine practice from which monumental statuary had disappeared, but including exquisite ivory carvings in which Eastern abundant patterning and Eastern rhythmic formalization took on something of Greek grace, (3) sporadic continuation of the Northern "barbarian" art, which crystallized in a few outstanding manifestations such as the Celtic crosses of Ireland and the Viking carved ornamentation, and then was diffused into varied crafts manifestations through Northern Europe, Spain, and Lombardy, and (4) a great many isolated examples of production where barbarian Roman and Byzantine currents crossed, resulting in ornamental sculpture of the most confused characteristics

In this period between late Roman realistic practice and the emergence of a first recognizable type of medieval sculpture—which occurred at about A.D. 1100—the Byzantine small sculpture must be considered the standard product

in Europe as well as in the Eastern Christian realm. An exceptional development is to be marked in Germany, where in the eleventh century a strange realistic strain came into evidence. An example is the cathedral doors at Hildesheim, made under the supervision of the craftsman-bishop Bernward. Perhaps he had studied the ancient monuments in Rome where he had been resident for a term of years as tutor of the boy-prince who was to become Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire as Otto III. There is reason to believe that the famous "Bernward column," with its spiral reliefs, was suggested by an examination of Trajan's Column. In any case there entered into German work of 1000-1050 a realistic note, and this brought about an unusual mixture of dramatic imaging and care for natural detail. The intention is obviously pictorial and documentary, although the barbarian naïveté and formalism always obtrude.

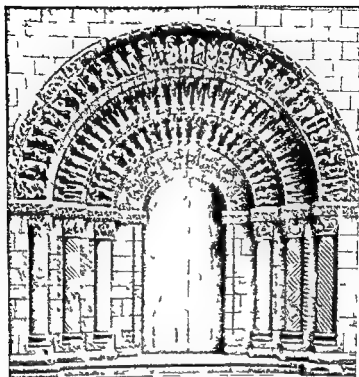
By the opening of the twelfth century, however, the truer forms of medieval sculpture had been established. Two main types can be detected. The general drift of critical opinion is that the Græco-Roman tradition had then run out, and that both types are resultants from essentially Northern or barbarian forces transforming a substantially Byzantine tradition. The one type is distinguished by rounded forms, flat panelling of figures, and a snug fitting of sculptural to structural parts. The other is distinguished by great vigour, by elongation of forms, by sacrifice of realism of statement to the necessities of rhythm and pattern.

Both types develop as an adjunct of architecture—unlike sculpture in the classic tradition. Both tend to be "unnatural." The approach is intuitively æsthetic rather than intellectual, there is strong feeling for the formalized design, and a corresponding carelessness about observed nature. In other words, medieval sculpture is strongly expressionistic.

The rounded type is, of course, nearer to the Byzantine product, and indeed it is impossible to draw a line between the art that is reflective of practice in the Persian-affected Eastern Empire and the Romanesque of Lombardy and Provence. In general this variety is to be seen in Northern Italy and in Southern France. In France the richest single exhibit is at Arles. There are ornamental sculptures with comparable flat formalization in Germany and Spain, and England had a great amount of it in the Norman period.

The exterior sculpture of the church of St. Trophime at Arles concentrated almost entirely in and around the porch of the Romanesque structure, is an exceptionally rich example. Here the influence of classic art may have entered



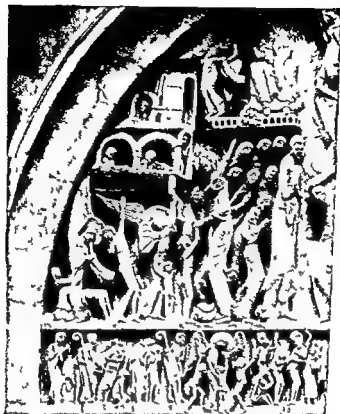


Porch of St. Peter's Church, Aulnay  
[Archives Photographiques]

in to an unusual degree, for Arles had been famous as a centre of Roman provincial art. There are classic capitals and mouldings folded into the typically Oriental aggregates of figured panels, ornamental bands and edgings, and accenting figures.

The recessed porches, constructed of joined arches in diminishing size, are a standard mark of Romanesque architecture, and already at St. Trophime the portal thus elaborated has become a chief repository for sculptural illustration and adornment. In the later Romanesque churches the porches will at times take on a greater unity and a closer texture of patterning—these are preparation for the great ornamental portals of the Gothic cathedrals—but at Arles the individual panels and figures already have a mature refinement of technique and an unsurpassed richness of light-and-shade effect.

The incidental sculpture of many a North Italian church—say at Bergamo, Ferrara, Genoa, and Brescia—will be found to have the same fullness and rounding, with, often, a sort of conventionalized patterning, or, again, a



Detail from tympanum, Autun Cathedral  
*[Archives Photographiques]*

playing with arabesque, which suggests a partial return to the Byzantine. Similar bits occur at points as far separated as Ripoll in Spain, Brunswick in Germany, and Ely in England

In the second type, as seen particularly at Moissac, Vezelay, and Autun in France, it is the Northern influence that has prevailed. This might be called the virilely elongated style of medieval sculpture. Forms are drawn out and angles sharpened, for vigour and dramatic emphasis. Linear methods come into play, for accenting edges and for the building of contrasted pattern-areas. For a moment the incomparably virile and eloquent line, which we remarked first in the Luristan and Ordos bronzes, which reappeared in Viking art, lives again in Romanesque sculpture. The tympanum group at



*St. Peter. Figure on portal of church at Moissac*  
[*Photograph by Warren Cheney*]

Vézelay, and even more forcefully the saints' figures on the jambs at Moissac, mark a summit of sculptural art in Europe. Nature has been violated, her forms twisted and distorted; but the composition lives with an intense plastic vitality.

If the monuments of Saxon and Norman England had not suffered so greatly at the hands of Time and the iconoclasts, there might be English parallels to the gorgeous sculpture of Moissac and Autun and Vézelay. There are

fought and repeatedly conquered the disorganized surviving remnants of the Latin peoples and the successive claimants to the Roman power. Their own chiefs had taken the title of emperor and pope when occasion arose. Now, capping that progression, the Germanic peoples have made themselves the guardians and the embodiment of the Christian spirit.

It is this circumstance that gives validity to the "Gothic" label as a persisting style-tag. The first application of it, in the field of the arts, was to come at the hands of the Italian Renaissance scholars, who wished thereby to show their disdain, damning the Northern Christian style with the name of the unlettered barbarian tribes. The later view is that the untutored and unclassical Northern peoples brought creative and purifying elements sadly needed by the Latin Christian stream.

In any case, the barbarians—Goths or Germans, Lombards or Franks, as the names are loosely used—had now taken over the reality, though not the official framework, of Western Christianity. It was their enthusiasm, their imagination, their unswerving faith, that built the Gothic cathedrals, pushed through the crusades, and brought forth a new kind of civic and cultural life in Europe. They brought religion back from the realm of the empire-dreamers to the round of everyday life, to immediate communal expression. Their enthusiasm and their faith failed to save the Church, failed to prevent degeneration of the crusades into political forays and looting expeditions, failed to fix the Gothic style as a lasting European way of art. But there are Reims and Chartres and Winchester to attest to a flaming leap upward of human aspiration. The builders believed they were shaping God's home on earth, and they poured their souls into their task.

There was a moment in that fateful twelfth century when Christianity, official and popular, Eastern and Western, trembled upon the verge of unification and world rule. The emperors in Constantinople, badly weakened, had broached to the Pope the idea of a reunion, and mapped a consistent attack against the Moslems, now resurgent under Turkish caliphs. There came a coincidence of official vision and popular enthusiasm. The first crusaders, despite incidental mass tragedy, pushed through to the Holy Land and in 1099 took Jerusalem from the Mohammedans to the appropriate accompaniment of a massacre and looting. When Jerusalem was lost again ninety years later, there still was spirit enough in Christendom, despite the mutual treachery and jealousy of Constantinople and Rome, to send the third

crusade across Europe in the direction of Palestine. But now it was led by kings and churchmen, this was the knightly crusade, made romantic by the far-sung exploits of Richard Cœur-de-Lion. The idea of a world union under the banner of Christ had been lost, had been bartered away by politicians and minor Cæsars.

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But what signifies chiefly for art is that there *is* that flame of spirit in the early and middle twelfth century. If it could arm with swords a hundred thousand pilgrims and send them crusading against the infidel Turk, it could arm other hundreds of thousands and set them building churches to the glory of God. This is of moment too: the Christian realm was no longer being ruled primarily by the Roman Church officials. The popes had often enough been weak, but hitherto the local priests and bishops, and the monasteries, had been the one controlling and related power. During the twelfth century the courts gain and the communes gain. The priests lose their hold, scepticism begins its gradual conquest of the European conscience and mind, the people grumble about paying their taxes to the representatives of Rome. But the spirit of independence, that will successively discredit and weaken and split the Church, now at the start adds up within the sum of Gothic will and impulse.

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In any case, the barbarians—Goths or Germans, Lombards or Franks, as the names are loosely used—had now taken over the reality, though not the official framework, of Western Christianity. It was their enthusiasm, their imagination, their unswerving faith, that built the Gothic cathedrals, pushed through the crusades and brought forth a new kind of civic and cultural life in Europe. They brought religion back from the realm of the empire-dreamers to the round of everyday life, to immediate communal expression. Their enthusiasm and their faith failed to save the Church, failed to prevent degeneration of the crusades into political forays and looting expeditions, failed to fix the Gothic style as a lasting European way of art. But there are Reims and Chartres and Winchester to attest to a flaming leap upward of human aspiration. The builders believed they were shaping God's home on earth, and they poured their souls into their task.

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In the general confusion surrounding the subject, making difficult any classification of the products as well as the uncovering of sources, the dividing-line between Romanesque and Gothic sculpture is wellnigh lost. Some leading authorities believe that the Romanesque label can be attached as long as the approach is mystic and formal—or expressionistic—and that Gothic is marked increasingly by realism and intellectualization. If so, there is a good deal of Romanesque sculpture in Gothic cathedrals.

The sculpture of Chartres Cathedral tells the story of the transition. The figures in the west portal are stylized and elongated to bring them within the architectural unity, and they have a certain purity of feeling, an almost primitive restraint. The Eastern or Northern concern for decoration as against illusion prevails: the abstract is still exploited at the expense of the concrete and the natural. But a change is already intimated. There is some little characterization in the faces of these elongated, straightened figures. The respect for the pattern and for the architectonic integration is destined soon to weaken. The later adornment of Chartres Cathedral finds the figures pushing out into importance on their own account, and taking on naturalness. The sculptors know more of anatomy and try for more of story interest and lesson, and they gradually lose decorative control and pattern effect.

In a great artist's hands the increased reasonableness and humanness of saint or Virgin or Noah or Lazarus did not mean a loss of stylization and sculptural feeling, although the values were different—less vigorous and less dynamic—than in the Vézelay figures. Gothic art continues to be rich in groups and bits that claim immediate admiration. Outstandingly popular are the *Gilded Virgin* of Amiens and the *Smiling Angel* of Reims, though sophisticated appreciation is likely to run off to diverging things like the gargoyles of Notre Dame de Paris, and—of special interest because indicating the intrusion of profane subject-matter—the famous “temptress.”

The French cathedrals are extraordinarily rich fields of exploration for the lover of sculpture, and museums the world over are filled with single religious figures, richly carved choir stalls, and decorative accessories. Never before or after in Europe did the sculptor practise at one time in so many media and so many fields: in stone and wood and metal, in monumental composition, architectural decoration, votive statue, miniature furnishings and caskets and ivories.

Nor is the geographical spread of the style less remarkable. Spain and England and Germany afford rich monuments. In Italy alone the Gothic is hardly





*Christ on Cross Swabia about 1200 [Courtesy Germanic Museum, Nürnberg]*

more than an incident. There the path to neo-classic realism is being opened at the very time of the building of the cathedrals in the North.

In Germany the medieval spirit lived on until the opening of the sixteenth century. While German scholars have constructed a framework of dates and styles, it seems to the layman often that Romanesque and Gothic expression in sculpture persist side by side, for almost three centuries. A Christ of the fifteenth century may have all the naive feeling and abstract formalization of early medieval expressionism, while a neighbouring Virgin and Child are

realistic, human, and knowing. The Germans were exceptionally masters of sculpture in wood, and the gallery of carved figures of the period 1200-1500 affords an extraordinarily varied and beautiful, and until recently unappreciated, display.

The naïve wood-carvings of Germany, the sculptures—superficially seeming so different—of Moissac and of Arles, the English-Norman crypts with short fat piers, the high-vaulted churches of Caen and Bayeux, and the lower arcaded structures of Lombardy, all add up, strangely, to something called a style. Still more strangely, that style, which draws generously upon the barbarian North, and upon the Asiatic East, and has lost wholly the accent of classicism, is called by a name derivative from Rome.



*Head of Christ, Swabia [Photo: courtesy German Railroads Information Office]*



## Gothic Art The Christian Apogee

GOthic architecture is the one clearest flame of the Christian spirit. It symbolizes the nobility and aspiration of the soul, the mystery of Christian worship, the sense of the immanence of the Divine. Gothic art emerged indeed at that moment when the spiritual genius of the European people escaped the prison of Roman authority, when popular enthusiasm and faith transcended the bickerings of popes and emperors, to be expressed in communal and æsthetic achievement.

Byzantine art had been an expression of the Christianity of the East. But the people who had there become Christianized already had stable art traditions, Persian, Mesopotamian, and Syrian, and these were easily continued and modified into the new religious expression. Constantinople, moreover, had been shaped by rulers obsessed with the ancient idea of imperialism. Roman and Oriental conceptions of worldly splendour met in the Byzantine capital. Nothing could have been less attuned to the gentle, mystic character of Jesus.

The Christian art of the West, in the nine centuries from the last Cæsars of classic Rome to the Cluniac development, smouldered and occasionally came alive in tiny flames, and once rekindled in the sustained but somewhat sombre glow of Romanesque architecture. But there was the confused light of mixed or still mixing cultures even in the final Romanesque expression. Within this composite and fitful fire, Roman, barbarian, but most strongly Byzantine embers were always to be discerned. The flame first leaps up, purified and intensely European, in the Gothic cathedrals.

When the Gothic age opens, in the early twelfth century, it is the Northern spirit that has triumphed in Europe. The barbarian tribes had harassed and fought the Romans in the republican and the imperial days. Later they had

fought and repeatedly conquered the disorganized surviving remnants of the Latin peoples and the successive claimants to the Roman power. Their own chiefs had taken the title of emperor and pope when occasion arose. Now, capping that progression, the Germanic peoples have made themselves the guardians and the embodiment of the Christian spirit.

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Inside the Church also there is an occasional burst of new spirit. The too grandiose monuments of the Romanesque flowering under Cluniac impetus brought about a reaction toward reserve and logic. Out of Burgundy again came an order destined to shape the new art. The Cistercian monks gave impulse to a counter-movement in the direction of unity, thoughtfulness, and thorough organization. Thus one more steadying influence is added within the confused complex of forces driving France on to Gothic expression.

The place of Gothic in the world organism of art is precise. It is as distinctive as the Greek, but unlike it in that it will flower suddenly, then fade entirely, leaving neither branch nor seed in the Europe that will immediately after be reclaimed for classicism by the intellectual realists of the Renaissance. Gothic architecture is an isolated expression approached in kind only by the late Romanesque. In some superficial or general ways it is like the Greek—in the thought-out logic of its way of building and in a certain noble solidity. In colourfulness and leaning to richly patterned surfaces, it has affinity with the Persian-Scythian expression. But if those two, the classic and the Iranian-Oriental, are to be considered as the outstanding manifestations of Western art, the Gothic is further from both than any other recognized European style.

The writing about Gothic art is strangely confused and confusing. Some experts group Greek and Gothic art as alike in being *realistic*. They then go on to differentiate the *kinds* of realism represented: the Greek is material and intellectual realism; the Gothic is "mystic realism." This will seem to many observers a stretching of terms, even a perverse misuse of commonly accepted handles; but there is thus much truth in it. A real and unusual circumstance of Gothic art is that within one of the greatest achievements of mystic expression in the building art there is a strain of fresh realistic expression, based on observation of nature.

There are other seemingly paradoxical aspects of the cathedrals, which hold within their walls almost the whole body of surviving Gothic art. They rose by a new logic of building, a thought-out architectural rationalism which made possible walls of lace and glass, framed within a forest of separated supports, but this rationalism was used in a magnificent gesture of faith—which many will call *per se* irrational. There was in short a new sense of a fixed plan of organic building, but it was only fragmentarily, even emotionally followed out. There is not extant a single complete drawn plan of a



Chartres Cathedral

[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

medieval cathedral, although partial plans are numerous. The builders, convinced of the feasibility of building in this new way, foreseeing the perfect adjustment and articulation of the complex whole, yet proceeded bit by bit, adding patch to patch, permitting vagaries to this master-mason or that sculptor. Often enough the system changed between one tower and another—witness Chartres and Rouen and Lincoln.

Realism and logic they are here, undeniably. But the total result is as unrealistic and illogical as a Mohammedan mosque or a Chinese temple. It is only by an effort of will, by a forced return to reality, that one actually *thinks* about the function of the lacy buttresses and clustered columns. For at first one is lost in the wonder of the soaring height of the building, its dark mystery, and the sudden glory of light in its coloured windows. The creative, mystic, and plastic values, even sensuous values, crowd in first, then the rationalism, the logic, can be distinguished as the mind asks for functional justification. And the realistic bits of flower and animal life, so much written

about in the art books, must be sought out, discovered as incidental notes within the gorgeous orchestration of the combined architectural and sculptural expression

The logic is there, in other words, in a sort of material framework. The natural leaves and tendrils and the gazelles and local maidens are there. But these artists in their hearts recognized a larger celestial framework of life determined by God, and art might better busy itself crystallizing the feeling of that, in terms appropriately breath-taking and supra-mundane.

As for the animals and flowers, they had been rediscovered, no doubt, with a sense of delight. Now they would be poured into this treasury of impressions of God's world. But the sculptor's intention is not realistic in the Italian or the Flemish way. He has merely widened his net till it catches the things that *are*—and mixes them among the things that (in art) have been, and others that might be. In the end it must be seen that realism is not a key to the explanation of Gothic art. There is a mingling of everything from abstract ornamentation through the stiffest distorted formalism to selective realism, and even an occasional naturalistic bit mirrored from surface life.

The crusades are an index to the life of the times. The religious enthusiasm of the people was equal to any task, any challenge. The loyalty was not directly to Rome, and no longer primarily to the monasteries, the local bishop was the leader who could stir the common folk to pour in the treasure necessary to erect a surpassing cathedral, and to bring in the guilds of artists and labourers. Civic pride supported religious fervour.

Just where the artists were now coming from, what was their position in this ferment of new life and building, are questions not fully to be answered. The monasteries were still the chief training grounds, but they had extended their educational classes to include laymen as well as monk-artists. There is yet no hint of that extreme individualism in art that will some day lead the sculptor to sign his work, or fix an architect's name in the histories. From the monastic communes there is a gradual transition to civic communes, in both, the artist and artisan remain anonymous. The finished work is the reward, though a faithful artist might also agreeably look forward to special favour in the Last Judgment, and beds of roses in the after-life.

Ralph Adams Cram believes that Gothic art is an expression of life at the highest point reached in human civilization—when liberty and obedience went hand in hand, individualism and discipline, humour and courage, faith and intelligence, a profound trust in divinity and a noble humanism. He notes



approvingly that there were in that era no industrial suburbs. And he continues "From the top of the battlemented walls one could look down into the crowded city, all gold and colour and glimmering spires and turrets and dizzy gables, with all the people as gay as tropical birds, in their bright raiment, or, from the other side, into fields and gardens and groves that spread around like a green sea, broken only by the white towers of monasteries amidst their orchards, grey castles crowning hill and headland, and perhaps lines of pilgrims, religious processions with bright banners, knights in shining armour, or a band of spearmen, passing on the winding roads. Whether you like it or not, the world then was a world of rampant beauty, and it is no wonder that the ruins that remain to us should be of such beauty as was hardly before, and certainly has never been since."

Of course one may take an opposite view, remembering the lack of sanitation, the dark alley-streets, the mud and slime, and the mean huts of the poor. Plagues were periodically taking a frightful toll of human life in all "civilized" countries, and doubtless the accelerating urbanization hastened these calamities.

Between the view that Gothic art was a sweet flower grown miraculously out of a dunghill or mudhole and the picture of it as part of the most beautiful way of life man has ever known, there is room for a middle view, for the belief that mankind then struggled for beauty in the ways of life, achieved it for limited classes of privileged citizens, had to close its eyes to the miseries of other classes. The standard was bettering. Perhaps for a time every submerged proletarian and beggar might join in great public works and have a gratifying sense of identification with civic pride and progress.

What one can be sure of is the opening of channels for artistic expression. Somehow the artisan, the builder, the sculptor, the glass-maker, had his living, was able to devote his time—joyously, if the sheer beauty and occasional humour in the work may be taken as evidence—to creating the orchestral poems at Chartres and Reims and Paris. His faith fed his vision. As foundation for his service to the Church, his devotion to the cause, organized religion paid his bills. The people of a community gave in their donations to the cathedral corporation, the corporation consulted with the masters of the guilds, the guilds' artisans and artists were employed wholesale, in a sort of obligated freedom seldom paralleled in the story of world art. There are eighteen hundred statues on or in Chartres Cathedral and that must have kept a small army of artists busy through many decades.

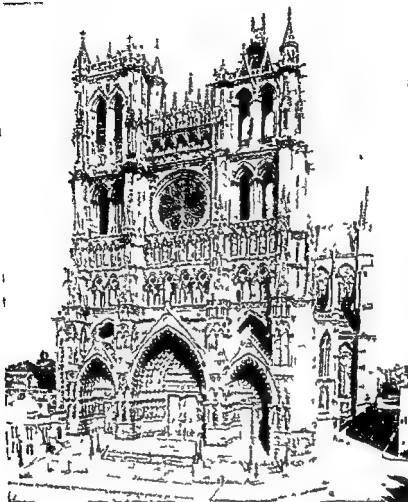
In architecture Gothic art was summed up. Never else did it so deserve the title "the mother art." The cathedral is the key to the understanding of Gothic art as a style. The cathedral is the treasure-house of sculpture, glass, goldsmithing, and minor arts, all these existing most nobly as ornaments integral to one organic fabric, to one distinctive way of visual appeal.

One steps into Amiens or Chartres or Notre Dame de Paris and instantly one's everyday consciousness of the world is blotted out. Thought is stilled. The common and immediate senses are overwhelmed, cease to grasp detail and to report impressions in the usual way. A flood of emotion sweeps the inner faculties. One is suffused with feeling. There comes the mood of mystic participation, of art possessing one's being. To the man sufficiently prepared, who has not lapsed from natural mysticism to a too complete intellectualism, the experience may rise to a state of spiritual exaltation, of quiet ecstasy.

If the building is Chartres or the Sainte Chapelle, the special sense-avenue to the impression, the mood, is obvious. It is that most gratifying, most impalpable means of the artist, colour. No other element or instrument so possesses and enchants the human faculties. Yet there are sober, sombre, quieter cathedrals too, holding one as breathless and wondering with little actual colour.

In the end it is the interplay of all the elements, structural and decorative, that creates the overwhelming effect of these Gothic piles. The architectural upward thrust and massing, the profusion of sculptured forms, enriching accenting and pulling together the vast fabric, and the colouring that spreads patterns high on the walls, or stabs brilliantly into the mysterious shadows, or spreads opalescent pools of crimson and gold and azure at one's feet—the sum and synthesis of the complex web is the first source of delight.

Christianity is among the world faiths that perpetuate the mystery religions of primitive peoples. In the communion, the congregation's periodic attendance at rites, the atmosphere of miracle and candle-lighting and sonorous invocation. The cathedrals are embodiments of this ritualistic, emotional and mystic spirit of Christianity, particularly of medieval Christian piety and ecstasy. The silent spaciousness and the brooding obscurity, the shadowy lofiness and the warm suffusing colour, the mysterious soaring vaults and rounded bays—all this is atmospherically right, perfectly attuned to the medieval way of worship and to the thought and superstition of the time. The Eastern or Byzantine Christian churches had been colourful, gorgeous,



Amiens Cathedral

[ND photo]

inspiring admiration for a brilliant outward magnificence, in Amiens or Chartres the effect is both colourful and mysterious, dramatic and other-worldly

The outward recognizable marks, which to the layman's eye make a separate style of the Gothic, are these—a sustained accent on the perpendicular, as seen in the vertical structural line and the elongated sculptural figures, the pointed arch, which carries the eye up but, unlike the rounded arch, does not bring it down again, and an emphasized skeleton structure of supports,



Diagram showing vault thrust and buttressing Amiens Cathedral  
 [Georg Krahel *Bilderatlas der Baukunst*]

integrated through myriad clustered pillars and buttresses and, hovering above, a complex of ribbed vault-ceilings, with screen-like walls between supports. There is a resulting lightness of effect (in contrast with the similarly perpendicular but heavy-walled Romanesque), and, aiding the airiness, not to say laciness, a breaking up of masses and areas and finials with sculptural patterning and ornamental variation. There is a rich complex of recessed panels of figures, lace-like edgings and perforated gables, and spires and finials that never approach their end straightly but always push out sprouts and points and crotchets. Within this broken patterned effect there is the division of window areas by means of tracery.

A different sort of wonder is found when the non-architectural mind delves into the technical and functional aspects of Gothic building. It is then

apparent that the long thin piers, the pierced walls, and the airy flying buttresses are not decorative additions to the structure, but are themselves exactly calculated structural features. Indeed the Gothic cathedral skeleton is the prettiest mathematical solution in the history of human building. The structure is organically alive in every part, equilibrated, articulated, with an exquisite play of pressure and support.

The possibility of distributing weight-thrust in arch-architecture goes back to the perfecting of the ribbed vault by the *Magistri Comacini*, the guild of master masons of Como. The vault pressure was lifted from the solid masonry walls and carried to the four piers at the corners of the area covered, and therefore the piers were enlarged and broadly buttressed. In French Romanesque buildings the heavy piers remained, although a part of the thrust of the central nave vaults was carried to the walls outside the aisles. Still the effect was essentially heavy. The windows were small and infrequent, and the piles of weight-carrying masonry obviously massive and cluttering.

The Gothic builders, seeking to lift the cathedral roof ever higher, and to lighten the aspect, arrived at a system of thrust and counter-thrust that is a marvel of ingenuity. The downward push and lateral pressure of roof and vault are carried by living members to piers outside the walls, even ones set at a distance from the building proper. The flying buttress is the key member in this Gothic fabric. It carries the thrust across space, over the aisle roofs, to supports that are out of the way.

In the diagram shown, the weight and the thrust of the vaulted roof, at right, are gathered on the piers. But these being in a wall too fragile to sustain the pressure, the large pier buttresses of masonry are built outside the aisle-walls, and flying buttresses constructed as carriers of the pressure at each vault corner. In some cases—most notably Reims—there is a double series of the supporting half arches bridging space. Seemingly to the uninitiated merely a remarkable achievement in adding decorations in perfect keeping with the architecture, they are in reality of the very bone of the building, vibrant with structural life. They are essentially props albeit refined into highly ornamental arcs and bridges.

The removal of the weight from wall and interior pier to distant buttresses permitted the lightness so typical of Gothic design. The walls are mere screens set in between the piers. Large areas between the slender uprights were given over without further thought to compositions of coloured glass within delicate traceries. At the front the upper nave was made glorious by the great

rose-window Lesser ones terminated the transept wings, over the side porches Indeed it may be said that the Gothic idioms, in general, grew out of the effort to elaborate the old nave-and-aisle church form, under ribbed vaults, in such manner that there would be generous window areas in façade, side walls, and clerestory walls

The most beautiful cathedrals are clustered in Northern France This was royal France, as distinguished from monastic France That is, Gothic art burst into flower where the court and lay elements in public life had measurably strengthened The ecclesiastic had weakened, yet art still served primarily religion At Amiens and Beauvais, Rouen and Chartres and Reims, and in Paris in two utterly contrasted expressions—the monumental Notre Dame and the miniature Sainte Chapelle—the spirit flamed and architecture became again a glory

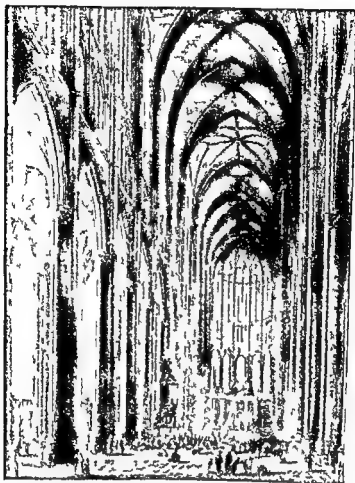
Of the period known as high Gothic, Amiens Cathedral is the most consistent expression The plan is the usual one, not unlike the Roman basilica in elementary outline and divisions, but with the Eastern modification of transept, resulting in the appropriate cruciform design The nave soars to a height of 150 feet, and the aisles are exceptionally lofty

If symbolism is to be read into the cathedrals—and seldom have second meanings been so obviously folded within architecture—the larger significance is the opposite of that of the Greek temple The ancients, enamoured of reason, had capped the aspiring line of the columns The emotional upward lift is tempered by intellectual restraint Thus is typified the Greek discipline of impulse by reason, in the uprising pillars bridged by the down-bearing mass of entablature and roof Others read the temple as a symbol of human aspiration levelled by fate

The medieval symbol is the aspiring line unbroken, the reach toward Heaven unstayed, gloried in The basic idioms are the pointed arches and the spires When the building leaves off, a thousand fingers point to God Victor Hugo said "The horizontal is the line of reason, the vertical the line of prayer"

The lesson of the upward pointing towers and spires was the more effective because the building was dominating and ever-present in the medieval community The bulk of the cathedral or church rose above the town, above the landscape This was the city-crown, the symbol of God's kingship

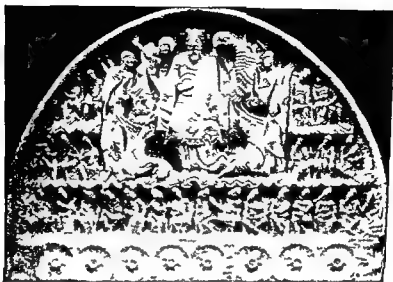
In countless ways—beside the actual picturing in windows and sculpture—the ideas of Christian worship were embodied in the architecture. The



Amiens Cathedral [From steel engraving by B Winkler after R. Garland, 1846, courtesy New York Public Library]

cruciform plan of the building is fundamental. In coming to church at all the worshipper is returning to the Cross. The nave of the church is the ship (*navis*) that bears the faithful to the haven of security and final rest.

The orientation of the cathedral equally had its meaning. The main façade faced the west, to the setting of the sun, to take the last light of day. On the larger sculptured area, the tympanum over the central doorway, it was usual to picture the Last Judgment. The priest facing the altar thus faced east toward Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and equally toward the rising of the sun. North porch and south, cold and warm, were more or less symbolic of the



Tympanum of church at Moissac [*Archives Photographiques*]

Old Testament and the New, at the south would be pictured the coming of Christ

Farther afield the symbolists find other, more subtle meanings. The Gothic cathedral, in its multiplicity of parts and forms and decorative details, is a mirror, so they say, of the medieval mind, in which all experience was valued, nothing rejected, and all brought within a Christian synthesis. The Greek had had no place for eccentricity, for curiosity, for the unreal. The Gothic mind attempts to bring a harmony out of the material and the spiritual, the real and the imaginative, the sublime and the grotesque. The concrete dissolves into the symbolic, the natural into the mystic, the logical into the yearning for God.

It is when one arrives at actual sculptures that one finds symbolism confusingly mingled with a fresh realism. The twelfth century is still three hundred years before the invention of the printed book, and long before any general diffusion of learning. The cathedral walls are the book of the age. And the illustrations are profuse, and often masterly.

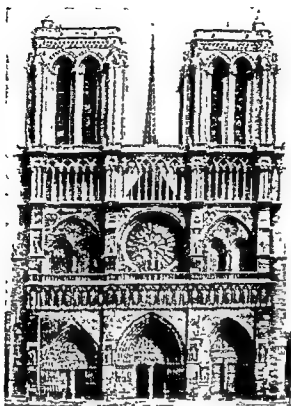
Like all illustration that sets forth fact or story convincingly, yet with art, the sculptured panels are filled with familiar figures and are explicit in depiction and narrative, even while formally alive. The story element beguiles





Two figures carved in oak Right *A Saint* Dutch 15th century  
Left *St Paul* Flemish about 1500 [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

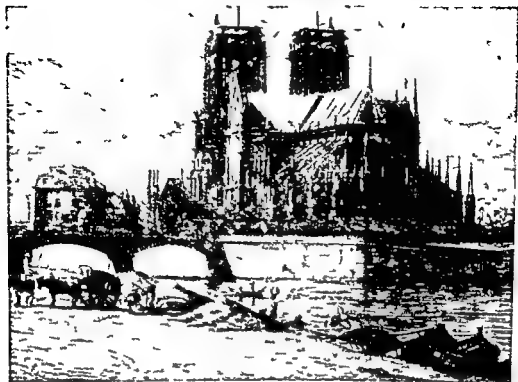
one but the greater marvel is the exhibited mastery of sculptural form—until the formal values are dissolved in a growing naturalism (Since a dividing-line between Romanesque and Gothic sculpture is impossible to draw, the entire subject as regards changes in technique and in spirit has been treated in the preceding chapter Examples are illustrated here merely to remind the reader of the close integration of sculpture and the architectural fabric, and to indicate the picture-book character of a typical cathedral tympanum and the growing naturalness of individual figures )



Notre Dame de Paris, east façade  
[Lévy Neurden photo, courtesy Editions Tel]

Notre Dame de Paris is one of the fullest expressions of the cathedral idea, although less dramatic than Amiens or Reims or Chartres. It is of exceptional interest to those who like to know their early, high, and late periods and methods. The front is of the middle period. It is mature and more reasoned than was usual. It is often cited, indeed, as the "classic" example of the H-form façade. The exuberance of Rouen and Reims is absent. A master-builder has brought system, almost a Greek discipline, to play over the Gothic elements. The fact that the spires were never added to the two towers is to be noted as contributing to the atmosphere of sobriety and restraint. The truncated stumps give pause to rising emotion.

The side porches are, in contrast, of the late period, and are agreeably light, lacy, and refined; but they lack the true Gothic vigour and largeness.



Notre Dame de Paris Detail of etching by Charles Meryon  
[Courtesy New York Public Library]

Portions of the choir section of the building, again, are of a different age of a time before either main façade or porches. Here one may see the daring use of flying buttresses, in a fine achievement of combined functional and decorative aims.

One of the most interesting studies offered by the play of national temperament upon imported forms is to be followed in the adaptation of Gothic design in the several Christian countries. There are recognizably Gothic buildings even in Asia and Africa, with strange hybrid accessories and sculpture. There is, too, the hardly less mixed expression in the pointed arch façades on the canals of Venice, and in the sort-of-Gothic envelope slipped over the Romanesque baptistry at Pisa. From Mexico and Canada to Syria and the Ukraine there are authentic echoes of this style that grew up in the Ile-de-France.

The German cathedrals, except those on the Rhine, near France, are likely to be less decorated, more forthright in their way of pointing toward heaven, as at Marburg and Lubeck and Trier. But the cathedral at Strasburg is an outstanding example of the late, obviously decorated phase, with lavish architectural lacework and abundant sculpture. The cathedral at Cologne may well be considered more French than German in stamp. It was modelled upon Amiens, and was under construction at intervals from 1248. Work was stopped in the sixteenth century and not resumed until the nineteenth. The interior of the vast structure is very impressive, and the exterior is rich in effect, although in the late portions the detail and the sculpture are less spirited.

The fine smaller church or Minster at Freiburg im Breisgau is one of the most consistent expressions of the Gothic, also in the recognizably French idiom, but exceptional in that it is constructed with a single tower at the front. Because in Germany houses were built in medieval style during several centuries when the Renaissance mode was fashionable elsewhere, the Gothic monuments have an exceptionally appropriate setting at Freiburg and Strasburg. At Ulm, too, the Minster rises up out of a picturesque complex of sharp-pointed roofs and towers, with an effectiveness that belonged, one may believe, to the cathedrals in the days when they were centres of worship rather than tourists' landmarks.

Perhaps the most idyllic settings are in England, where cathedrals were oftener built at monastic centres in the country than in congested cities. Salisbury and Lincoln and Gloucester gain immeasurably by their parklike surroundings. As architectural organisms the English structures are less impressive than the French. There is not the close knitting of structural parts, the marvellous articulation of members. The nave is held closer to earth so that the soaring aspect is less in evidence. Nor do the English builders refrain from using the effects incidental to vaulting and buttressing for display rather than functional service. These are, nevertheless, great and inspiring monuments of the building art, and it is only in comparison with the more consistent French cathedrals that one notes the failure to reach the highest point of architectonic design and creative magnificence.

In England the spreading of the vault ribs for decorative effect led to the 'fan vaulting' which is a distinctive feature of late Gothic building. It is seen to best advantage in the chapel of King's College at Cambridge and in



Cathedral at Freiburg im Breisgau

*[Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]*

Gloucester Cathedral In decadent form the fan vaults grew pendants like stalactites, and finally all sense of architectural integrity was lost

A central tower rises over the crossing of nave and transepts in most English cathedrals. The builders had a marked preference for square forms—perhaps a Saxon survival—and the squarish tower distinguishes the English structures as does no other feature. It forms, as it were, a distinctive and dominating crown, heavy and solid even while delicately ornamented with

the usual attenuated buttresses and spires. Thus the vast building is centred as seen from a distance, and given a unity of bulk and a focal part not known in the French structures.

There was a sequence of sub-styles, known as the Early English Gothic, the Decorated Gothic, and the Late or Perpendicular Gothic. The last-named was the most inventive phase on British soil. In it the vertical members were stressed—even added to, illogically—and a compelling pattern created in which the perpendicular lines dominated, in a sort of extravagant architectural embroidery. The outstanding examples are the Chapel of Henry VII in Westminster Abbey, and parts of Gloucester Cathedral.

Westminster Abbey in its general disposition of parts and its structural features is the most French of the English Gothic monuments, but on French ground it would appear uninspired, even dull, lacking sensitive adjustment. It is rather in those buildings that have a distinctive English decorativeness, as at Gloucester and Salisbury and Lincoln, that one finds the country's medieval architecture at its best. Perhaps the most appealing of English Gothic structures are, in the end, the smaller churches, which took on a beauty of form and of incidental decoration that lifts them to a very high place in the annals of religious building. In one's memory of the English provinces nothing else lingers quite so long, and with such intimate appeal, as the lovely church spires.

In Spain there are two main roads of Gothic development: the one determined by French influence, brought direct by church officials and by imported builders, the other determined by the mixing of the Northern influence with impulses surviving from Moorish building. The great cathedrals at Burgos and Barcelona, at Leon and Toledo, are counted among Europe's impressive Gothic structures. But the more distinctive Spanish expression, marked by a typical exuberance of decoration, occurs at the meeting-points of Christian and Saracenic cultures—as at Valladolid and Granada and Seville.

In France as elsewhere the story of Gothic architecture ends in logic forgotten and decoration over-exploited. Even Rouen Cathedral, commonly counted among the ten or twelve greatest structures, is characterized by a masklike façade, pretentiously encrusted and lacy, that is a long way from the comparatively plain and sober façades of Chartres and Paris, with their

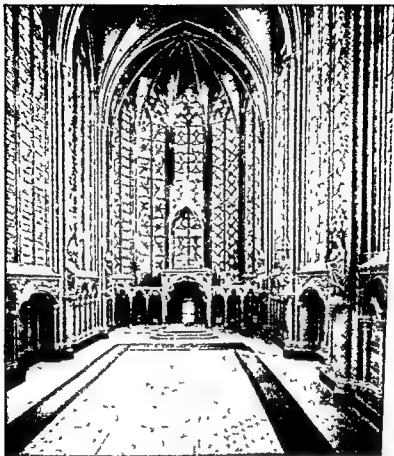


Salisbury Cathedral

parts and members declaring their functional and structural reasons for being. Amiens and Reims are the two great monuments between, at the point where decoration is gorgeously rich but not yet destructive of architectural integrity.

A gem of Gothic architecture is the comparatively tiny Sainte Chapelle in Paris—perhaps the most loved of Gothic buildings, for its colourfulness and its unusual intimacy. A reliquary chapel, with a crypt beneath, the building is small enough to have complete unity. One enters the main hall to encounter a harmonious complex of delicate supports framing windows enchantingly coloured. Nowhere else is one able to lose oneself so completely in ambient colour, to bathe one's senses so in a glory of light. Architect and artist in glass have created more than a building: rather an atmosphere, a feeling. At Chartres the glass is glorious too. But there the poetry of architecture is nearer epic, less sweetly lyric.

The stained glass window that contributes so much to the richness of the Gothic cathedral was simply one more flower of medieval craftsmanship. The craft was handed on to the Gothic workers with enamelling, goldsmith-

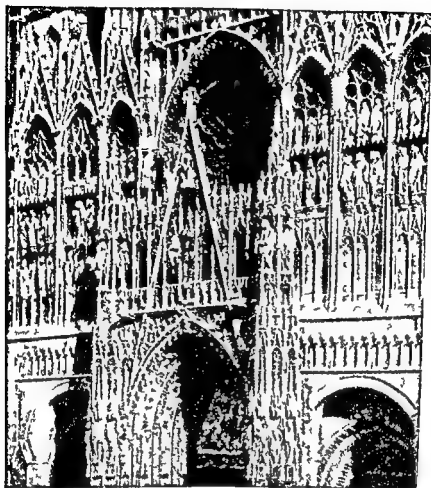


*Sainte Chapelle, Paris*

ing, ivory-carving, and other miniature arts, with something of the stamp of Persia upon it. Never else in Europe, before or after, did colour enter into architecture as in the Gothic piles. Nor was the mastery of the Gothic glass-workers of Paris and of Chartres again approached.

As in the architectural fabric, the larger skeleton of the window design was logically determined, to fit within the web of structural members and to withstand wind strain; though the window itself may seem purest fantasy. The method of construction was to lay down the outlines of the broader arcas in bars of iron, then fill in with tiny bits of coloured glass, soldering





Late lacy Gothic decoration Detail, Rouen Cathedral

*[Photo courtesy Editions Tel]*

them together with lead, and to vary the effect with larger glass areas whereon the designs had been painted and the pieces then fired. Most windows tell serial stories from Old and New Testament legendry. But the drawing carries on Byzantine formalism, without hint of naturalistic intention. And indeed it was as decorators, not as illustrators, that the designers triumphed. Whatever was the effect of incorporated story and lesson upon the faithful in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in our times a hundred observers glory in the jewel-like patterns and the cloud of colour for every one who goes on to the deciphering of the meaning or message. The window is a

sort of translucent mosaic, in which colour, not subject, is the lasting marvel

There was in France a Gothic secular architecture, at first in châteaux and fortresses, then in town halls and houses of the rich. But it was rather in Flanders to the North that the burgeoning civic spirit led to the construction of monumental Gothic buildings for other than religious purposes. There the guild halls and municipal halls surpass those of France. Best known are the Cloth Hall at Ypres and the City Hall at Brussels. The style crept into the domestic architecture of the Low Countries and of Germany. The steep-pitched roofs and lingering bits of Gothic ornamentation still afford a medieval aspect in parts of Bruges and Nürnberg and Rothenburg.

But it is the cathedral that is Gothic architecture in its essence. The style there came to a purity within grandeur not achieved in any other. It enfolded without destruction of unity or integrity, a host of minor arts so that within its porches and bays and retables are enshrined some of the world's masterpieces of carving and in its windows unsurpassed glories of decorative picturing art, and on its altars a wealth of gold and ivory and jewelled furnishings. But when the Gothic adventure came to its end there was to be no repetition, hardly an echo. The spirit expressed was gone, the way of life that made expression possible was gone.

Toward the end the gold, the carving and the colouring had been carried over to castle, to guild hall, to home. But it was a faith, a devotion, now seeped away, that had created the synthesis that is Amiens or Reims or Chartres. Very truly God had entered into the building of the cathedrals. Now mankind was ready for some other adventure, outside the realm of spiritual imagination and devotional expression.

*Italy at the Twilight of Medievalism*

IN ITALIAN history there is a golden morning, before the full day of the Renaissance, when a clear fresh light suffuses the arts. Northern Europe is then passing into the twilight of medievalism. But in Italy, where the Gothic growth had never been acclimated, the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century religious art is linked in spirit with the most virginal medieval manifestations. In Assisi and Siena and Florence naïve faith and a sunny piety have lingered on. Above all a kindly and personal Christianity has been re-born, in Assisi. The spirit of the era and of the place may best be termed, from the name of the Assisan saint, Franciscan.

But if the feeling of the time harks back to monastic medievalism, and through it to early Christianity—that of a time before the overlaying of Jesus's message with priestly dogma and worldly imperialism—it also breathes a note of humanism which belongs to the following Renaissance.

Contemporary with the later, hardening expression of the Gothic culture, it yet escapes the heavy piety of the North. Foreshadowing as it does the free spirit and human sympathy of the Italian rebirth, its freedom is within a devotion to God, and its humanism a spiritual one—as against the intellectual and pagan sort characteristic of later Florentine and Roman culture.

In short, this rather pale light that shone during the brief golden morning of Italian art may be considered as constituting the dawn of the Renaissance, but at the same time the glow of it is somehow indistinguishable from the twilight effulgence of the medieval. A fresh, light, smiling aspect comes into European art. But it is still of the spirit, in no way fleshly and realistic and knowing, as will be the art of Masaccio and Correggio and the Venetians. In being calm and simple, and in a sense consecrated, it is not thin or cold or

strange On the contrary it is colourful and intimately appealing Seldom in the history of the world has the *warmth* of the spirit been so purely transmitted in works of art

The spiritual essence is imaged forth sympathetically in depicted human beings, but only in the most innocent types The Byzantine Madonna becomes a woman, but as Bargagli points out, it is the Sienese gentlewoman, "at the presence of whom the eyes are filled with pleasure, the ears consoled, the spirits restored, the intellect nourished, the abilities made stronger, more refined and more perfect" And he adds, with a glance in the direction of Florence "She disdains to give herself up all day or all night to dancing as is the custom in some places"

The spiritual symbol of the time is St Francis The literary is Dante The school of painting that expresses most completely the reserved but colourful character of it is the Sienese, with the simple harmonies and rhythms of Duccio and Simone Martini and Sassetta fixing for all time the naive faith in the naïve fashion that is sometimes called "primitive" Giotto is the culminating figure, picking up all the resources that make for melody, glow, and fragrance, but moving on toward freedom and full incorporation of seen objects and emotions

Last belated figure, but personally more representative than any other—in his gentleness, his saintly humanism, and his instinctive expression of the spiritual in sensuous and lyric terms—is Fra Angelico The young monk-painter might be taken as type-figure of the artist in the Franciscan age It is recorded that he remained kneeling the whole while he was painting the figures of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, and he wept continuously as he worked on the frescoes of the Crucifixion His life was so blameless that he was called *Beato*, the blessed one

Art had come to Western Europe first in Italy Etruria had been its earliest home, then Rome When the Romans, having dissolved Etruscan art in the borrowings from Hellenistic Greece, established provincial cities in France, Spain, Britain, and Germany, the native peoples of those countries were barbarians with only the most elementary culture When, after the Roman decline, Byzantium sent successive waves of cultural influence over the West, Italy again profited most, as is attested especially at Ravenna and Venice When another sort of wave, from the North, brought the independent art and spirit of the Germanic peoples, the Lombards gave Italy its share of the fruits thereof The Italians were, it might be said, least innocent of the older

arts of all the European peoples. And they had historically been pioneers in every advance.

It was only in the tenth and eleventh centuries that the torch had been carried to the North. Leadership in Europe then definitely passed to France. The Romanesque and the Gothic styles flowered there, and went on to conquer England and Germany. But today, when the "Italian primitives" are again being appreciated, after a five-hundred-year eclipse, it is recognized that Italy was, even at the zenith of Gothic culture, preparing for another epochal manifestation. The stage was being set for a return to Italian artists as leaders, even in that century which saw the building of Amiens and Reims.

The mysticism of St. Francis was of a sort that valued the identification of the individual soul with all life, in a God-created unity, yet did not run to physical mortification and withdrawal from the world. The piety of St. Francis was based on a sense of the dignity of the human soul, the immanence of God—with little said about the host of intercessionary figures approved by the Roman Church—the goodness of nature, and the importance of being happy in this world as well as in the next.

The Franciscan conception of Christianity, thus so godly and so human, marrying the ecstasy of the spirit with delight in the actual physical world, finding love a radiant thing, is perfectly the background of the Sieneese panel paintings, so modestly done yet so enchanting in their bright colours and gold, always devotedly Christian in theme yet sensuously lovely. The Christian message is no longer fearsome, rather the subjects tend to be touching. The beholder is reminded to be charitable, compassionate, and loving. Kindliness and charity run like a refrain through the incidents and imagery. Simplicity, calm, clarity, and sweetness are in the line and colour of Franciscan painting.

The message of this art comes with the gentle beauty expressed by Giovanni Colombini, the Sieneese mystic, in his letters to Paola Foresia, Abbess of the convent of Santa Bonda. To her and the sisters, Colombini wrote: "Most dear friends. How can I express the affection and the charity which my heart and soul feel towards you?—charity and affection ardent and burning with the love of the Holy Spirit, transforming everything through devotion to Christ. May it enter your souls like flame, with gentle penetration."

St. Catherine of Siena found evidences of the divine love in nature and in her garden; she cultivated lilies and roses quite as she cultivated the vision



School of Duccio *Madonna and Child with Two Saints* Collection Richard M. Hurd  
[Photo, courtesy Newhouse Galleries]

understood. For there is seldom integration of structure and decoration. There are no examples of that daring based on logic that makes the glory of Reims and Amiens.

There are rather integrated Gothic structures holding up Italianized façades or, more often, Italian Romanesque buildings traced over with Gothic lacy and pointed ornamentation. The cathedral at Siena, planned by the Cistercian monks under French influence, has vaults and arches direct from the North, but Italian artists treated the surfaces in their own way. At Como, on the contrary, the cathedral is in frank Romanesque style, on the ancient basilica plan, and there are even hints of a return to classic clarity, but the edges are enriched with high elongated panels of Gothic sculpturing, and pointed spires sprout incipiently at likely corners of the roof. One remembers that the masons of Como three centuries earlier had perfected the groined vault that made possible the Northern development of the Romanesque, and so of the Gothic. But when the flower is brought back to Lom-

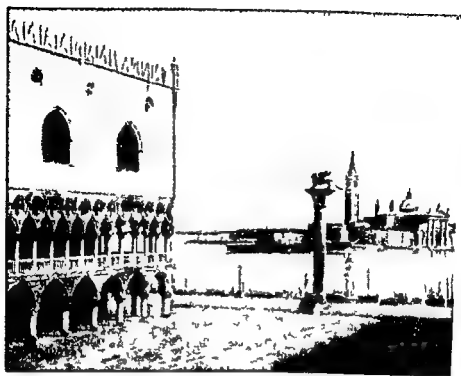
bardly it fails to take root, it is merely on exhibition, and not too happily

The most monumental Gothic building in Italy, and the truest to Northern principles, is in near-by Milan. The cathedral there, more bespired than Salamanca or Cologne, is decked out in Gothic togs rather than basically expressive of the vertical logic. The mass of the building has an un-Gothic spread. The perpendicular towers and the forest of spires are added to a structure essentially low-lying. Whatever the thousands of heaven-pointing pinnacles say, the building is squat, not soaring.

In the glare of the Milanese sun, too, the exterior takes on a little the effect of cake-icing. For florid tastes—the French would say for Italian tastes—it is a masterpiece. For others it is most rewarding at dusk, when a half-light softens the effort to ornament every foot of surface. And always there are genuine and heart-stilling experiences to be had within, where miracles of colour are met in the profound silence of the nave, among the immense trunks of the inner piers.

French architects, then German, then Italian, are known to have worked on the structure. That fact might be offered as a key to the lesser importance of the Gothic architecture in Italy. It was half-heartedly imported, never fully understood. It was briefly accepted as a fashion. It was to suffer eclipse under the Renaissance, and indeed no architect or decorator of the *Quattrocento* will scruple to destroy Gothic works or replace them with the more Italianate revived-classic.

At Pisa the great group of ecclesiastical buildings is sometimes cited as Italy's outstanding Gothic exhibit. But the effect again is one of surface manipulation. The plans and structural methods of the cathedral and the baptistry are nearer Roman, Byzantine, and Romanesque than Gothic. The Campo Santo is structurally a Lombard cloister. The campanile (better known as the Leaning Tower) is unlike anything in the North of Europe. But there is considerable built-on Gothic façading, as decoration of both cathedral and baptistry. Indeed nothing could be more eloquent of the vacillation of the Italian city-states over the acceptance of the French style, than this group of hybrid erections inescapably impressive, if only for size and correlated plan, yet palpably patched together out of a half-dozen successive fashions of building. There are classical capitals and columns within the basilicalike cathedral, probably taken by the Pisans as spoils from some conquered Sicilian city. The original architect of the cathedral is supposed to have been a Greek, who would have been Byzantine-trained. The main structural forms



Piazza San Marco Venice, showing Doges Palace

are Romanesque. Finally someone added the Gothic ornamental features.

It is not to be overlooked that many incidental virtues are to be uncovered in a study of the Pisan monuments, and fascinating bits found on every hand. Every art-conscious traveller remembers his days spent there as crowded with excitement and rewarding discovery. Ruskin wrote eloquently of the symphonic nature of the architecture of the cathedral and especially stressed the relationship of the rhythms of the superimposed arcades of the façade to the proportions of the whole. The interior arcade of the Campo Santo achieves more of simple harmony, with its graceful Gothic tracery inserted into wide Italian arches. But the whole group is very far from an exhibit of a pure style. Perhaps we should, like our Italian friends, explain that the virtue here, as generally in Italian Gothic, is in variety rather than logical unity.

Such had been the halting Gothic adventure in Italy. Venetian, Lombard, Tuscan, had recognized the medieval style of the North, had played with it



fitfully, had ſettled back to enjoyment and employment of older idioms. In architecture the next ſtep will be that epochal adaptation of the antique Roman forms that will uſher in the full Renaiſſance. But long before the building of the Milan Cathedral or the decoration of the Palace of the Doges there had been born in Aſſiſi the ſaint whoſe ſpirit was to inform another art, painting, and to evoke during this twilight of the Gothic an expreſſion truly Italianate, and beſt underſtood as Franciſcan.

*The Sieneſe painters are the trueſt artiſts of the Franciſcan ſpirit. At firſt ſomething of the preceding Byzantine ſtiffneſs perſiſts. It is to be remembered that the art of the Eaſtern Roman Empire had ſpread and reſpread over Italy. Thus the icons were implicit in the early Sieneſe manner. But even in Duccio, who began to paint late in the thirteenth century, a freſh harmony and an enlightened naïveté are evident.*

It is not difficult to detect in Duccio's pictures a conſidered linear felicity and a harmony of parts without Italian precedent. The figures and faces alſo have a human grace unknown to the Byzantine artiſts. Their attitudes expreſs an actual devotion, they are not merely ſymbols hardened by tradition into ſet form. There is ſweetneſs in the countenances. The type known as 'the motherly Madonna' replaces the Byzantine abstraction. It is not to be inferred that the mediæval ſtyle lacked virtues of its own. On the contrary, the Byzantine panels are diſtinguiſhed by a fine largeneſs in design, with ſtrong plastic vitality, that is deſtined to be loſt, lamentably, in later Italian painting. It is Duccio's merit that he preſerved meaſurably the pictorial architecture of the Eaſtern ſtyle even while adding this other felicity and freſhneſs.

The citizens of Siena were fighters and patriots as well as churchmen. And if religious paſſion inſpired their work, there is in it nonetheleſs a reflection of civic pride. The independent poſition of the city-states of this time, and the new importance of the citizen as ſuch, are partial cauſes of the advance out of the traditional ways of expreſſion. Perhaps the freedom of the individual is the framework within which the artiſt can be more effectively faithful and devoted than ever before. The Statute of 1355 in Siena bound artiſts to be "by the grace of God revealers of thoſe marvellous things which operate by virtue and in virtue of Faith."

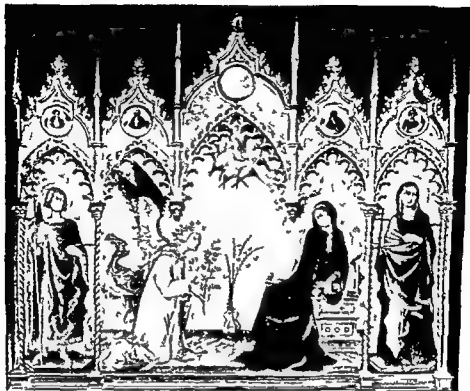
A contemporary of Duccio deſcribes an incident indicating at once the civic feeling and the religious devotion of the people of Siena. The painter



Duccio *Christ in the Garden* [Photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

had completed an altarpiece for the church. The account of its placing is thus transcribed by Piero Misciattelli: 'The picture was carried to the Duomo, accompanied by a worthy and devout company of priests and monks, the Signori del Nove, all the officials of the Commune and the general public. The procession walked around the Campo, while all the bells of the city rang out a joyous peal in honour of such a noble picture, which was made by Duccio di Niccolo, painter, in the house of Muciatti, outside the gate of Stalloreghi. And all that day was given up to orations, all the shops were shut and many alms were given to the poor, while prayers were offered to God and His Mother who is our advocate, beseeching that we should be defended by His Mercy from adversity and every evil, and from the hands of traitors and enemies of Siena.'

Thus was no common picture, and the celebration was, of course, in honour of the Virgin Mary, whom the painting portrayed. She was the Queen of Siena (just as, for a time, Christ was officially King of Florence). But the fact remains that art thus entered into the common life and the religious passion of the people. Between the lines of the account, supposed to be from the hand of an eye-witness, may be read many of the background facts, of



Simone Martini *The Annunciation* Side panels by Lippo Memmi *Uffizi Gallery, Florence* [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

becomes a field of goldsmith's patterning, with the golden ground incised and pricked in intricate design

By reason of the greater surface enrichment, Simone Martini's pictures lose something of the singular simplicity of Duccio's. But the figures are presented without background. The Renaissance concern with perspective and scientific anatomy is still far off. The composition is flattened, and the sense of distance is gained in the manner of the Chinese who 'lay up' the several elements in a painting. The mural in the Council Room of the Civic Hall at Siena, celebrating the Virgin Mary as queen and, in a sense setting her up as presiding officer of the City Council is a glorious example of art serving several functions: pious in its iconography and symbolism, finely, even Orientally rich in decorative effect, and breathing a majestic largeness, as befits civic art.



Ambrogio Lorenzetti *It cides ts from : tle Story of St N cl olas of Bari*  
*Academy Gallery Florence [Brogi pl oto]*



Duccio *Madonna and Child* [Courtesy National Gallery London]

the setting for the emergence of the art of fourteenth-century Italy the joint *fiesta* of churchmen and citizens, the love of Mary and the prayer for destruction of Siena's enemies, the devoutness and the thought of alms-giving, the joyous pealing of bells and the holiday orations celebrating a gold-and-colour tablet from a craftsman's studio

Duccio's altarpiece is a perfect example of the transitional painting, to which cling formalisms unmistakably Byzantine, but within a freedom already Italian. The figures are flattened and separate, almost geometrically disposed, in true icon fashion. But already the faces have been humanized, and if the bodies are not confessed as flesh and blood realities beneath the garments, at least the draperies themselves escape the traditional stiffness, and even lend their folds and edges to linear harmonies. Mary is a woman, a mother, is studied, one must believe, from those very Sienese women who followed the picture in the procession round the "Campo" and prayed before it in the church.

On the back of the altarpiece Duccio painted forty-four smaller scenes, of the Passion and of church festivals, in the same transitional manner. But the works live in their own right. The flat mural technique, with fields of gold taking the place of later landscape vistas and architectural compositions, and the obviously rhythmic disposition of the figures, afford continual delight to the eye. Duccio's special touch of outlining the folds of garments in gold adds an element of linear counterpoint to the simple melodies. The device is well illustrated, along with the lingering Byzantine richness of patterning and the particular Sienese delicacy, in the *Madonna and Child* altarpiece in the National Gallery, London. The *Transfiguration* on the same walls is a marvellous example of simplification for the sake of majestic calm and uninvolved decorativeness.

Duccio died about 1319. His family refused to accept his estate because it was overburdened with debts. But he had written his name in the annals of world art.

Simone Martini carried on even more beautifully a splendour of colour transmitted by the Byzantine painters from the Orient. His pictures almost invariably are enriched with gold-encrusted and sumptuously patterned areas. One sees them in the Virgin's robe, in throne-panels and hanging stuffs, even added arbitrarily as tracery and arabesque within the haloes and along the sleeve-edges. The feathers of an angel's wings become frank decoration, the aureole around a saint's head or enclosing the enthroned Virgin

There are traces of Gothic feeling and idiom in the work. And indeed Simone Martini, unlike his teacher Duccio, was an international figure, known at the French court in Naples, and resident for a period at the Palace of the Popes in Avignon at the time when the papacy was transferred to the Provençal city. Indeed he is a link between the Italian and the French primitives.

With two brothers, Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Siennese painting moved another stage away from Byzantine formalism and toward Italian realism, though not so far that there fails to be unmistakable a naïve primitivism, treating a reality still dreamlike. The gold and the flat compositional pattern remain, but the earlier geometric disposition of figures gives way to more natural grouping. And Ambrogio studies the human face and endows it with a precise though hard realism, and adds background vistas somewhat pictorial. It is not this, however, that arrests the eye and holds one breathless—it is rather the glow of colour, the flowing grace of line, and the wealth of movement—with a hint of that pageantry in painting which will flower a century later on Florentine walls.

It is still a fashion among critics and historians to dilate upon the insensitiveness of the Siennese artists and to stress the retrograde spirit that permitted the city to lapse back and die out of the drama of Renaissance worldly progress. The city of death, it is called, partly because the artists failed to see and paint the pageant of life that was passing in her own streets and was staged in her *festas* and fighting and also because they failed to give ear to the new scientific knowledge that was revolutionizing painting in neighbouring Florence. But it should be enough that Siena is herself to the last, preserving the fresh faith and mystic fervour and the sunny humanism of the age of Francis.

In Siena the lover of Chinese painting is more at home than in any other field of European art. There is a like repose and harmony and otherworldliness in the two manifestations. And indeed, even among the lesser Siennese artists of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries one is continually discovering *Crucifixions and Madonnas and retellings of the Passion incidents and the saints' stories* that sing with colour and weave melodious rhythms of line, and so still the mind and fill the heart with contentment.

Most exquisite in workmanship, and most fluent in composition, is Stefano di Giovanni, better known as Sassetta. He is one of the most satisfying of the secondary masters, and he carried on the Siennese tradition undefiled until his



Sassetta *Christ in Limbo*

[Courtesy Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University]

death in 1450 Giovanni di Paolo and Sano di Pietro continued to produce the panel pictures for thirty years longer. If their art loses a little of the primitive simplicity of the strong formal manipulation and patterning, their paintings nevertheless as seen in Siena or as far away as in New York afford a deep and a lasting pleasure—each picture made rare with the author's own distinctive sort of naive charm.

But Giotto was the golden one of the early morning of Italian painting. In him the sensitive colouring and the simplified approach to story-telling, the fresh Franciscan faith and the budding humanism, the abstract formalism of the East and the unfolding spirit of freedom of the West—in him these met. In his work is the first monumental expression of European painting. He initiated a major era.





Giovanni di Paolo *Madonna with Child and Saints*  
*Collection Montland Griggs New York*

Giotto has often enough—since Raphael's sweetness began to stir—been called the greatest European painter. And indeed no other is quite so fitted to please the tastes of realist and abstractionist alike. He is at once a superb illustrator and an ingratiating decorator. His story-book of the life of St. Francis in the Upper Church at Assisi touchingly brings to visual actuality the events and the message of the saint. But mural art elsewhere was seldom so purely handled as a medium.

Giotto is a simple man of the people and of the faith, in close affinity with the Sieneſe artiſts. But he adds urbanity—without ſophiſtication. He is ſtill mediæval-minded, though after him could come only the full Renaiſſance and its expreſſion rooted in ſcience. He was the firſt of thoſe who, like the Greeks, were to be intereſted primarily in people. He ſaw God and Mary and the ſaints through his knowledge of men and women. Yet his faith and humility ſurvived. And his plastic ſenſe remained that of the decorators, the arrangers of abſtract figures on a two-dimensional ground. He takes on additional depth, his figures have volume, but the painter does not yet puncture his background with perspective viſtas, or ſacrifice pattern to elaboration of ſtatement. If he impinges upon the Renaiſſance, he is equally the laſt to exploit nobly the heritage of the Byzantine.

Giotto's immediate background is not Sieneſe but Florentine. But, if one may venture the thought, Florence is not yet Florence. Giotto is only ten or twelve years the junior of Duccio. His teacher is Cimabue, who has but ſlightly ſoftened the aſterity and rigidity of traditional Italo-Byzantine painting. At this time the Sieneſe and the Piſans rather than the Florentines are the pioneers of a new experimental humaniſm and freedom in art. In them the ſpirit of Francis ſeems to have ſtirred firſt a new viſion of the ſervice of art to God and the Church. In this earlieſt Florentine period Sieneſe painters are called to work ſide by ſide with the local artiſts. There is yet no hint of the intellectual and ſcientific evolution ſo ſoon to come. Cimabue is called to Aſſiſi to help decorate the Church of St. Francis, and takes the boy-artiſt Giotto with him. Cimabue's own murals there, although badly defaced, indicate a memorable gift for majeſtic compoſition, within the Byzantine iconographic method. But ſoon Giotto's harmonious and compact deſigns were to mark the pupil as the greater maſter.

Giotto, without confining himſelf within the Byzantine conventions, the ſtiffneſs of the ſeparated figures, the ſtrictly geometrical diſpoſition of elements, and the flat laying-up of planes, carries on the glow of gold-and-colour and a decorative linear emphasis. In giving a greater ſculptureſque fullneſs to the figures he yet remembers the Eaſtern mural technique, the conception of the picture as a decoration with plastic completeness of its own, a poised and powerful movement-life within a ſtrictly bounded depth-range.

But it is his humaniſtic innovations that are epochal. He introduces believable, perſuaſive human beings as protagonists—not yet ſtrongly individual-

ized not anatonuically impressive, but observed from life rather than copied from traditional approximations. To this too he adds a believable movement-flow, a sense of varied, richly textured life. And over it all is the essentially Italian spirit, now for the first time crystallized in painting—a manner gracious lazily colourful, sunny. It is as Italianate as the rhythmic round-arched cloisters.

Born to pastoral surroundings, in the Tuscan hills, he came naturally perhaps by his easy-going, sunny qualities. The legend tells, plausibly, how Cimabue, already famous, came upon the boy tending sheep and at the same time making drawings upon a smooth stone, and was so struck with his talent that he straightway took him to Florence to be his pupil and apprentice. There in Cimabue's *bottega*, or street-shop, no doubt the youngster learned to grind colours, to prepare the gesso-grounded panels of poplar wood that then did service as "canvases" to carve and gild frames in the Gothic style, and a hundred odds and ends of the craft and business of being a painter. There would be lessons in drawing too, then colouring, in the slow tempera technique, using sticky egg base paints on the gesso panels. And finally would come instruction in the fresco medium, so difficult because strokes once made could never be altered, a misstep meaning, often, the scraping away of the entire plaster panel and relaying a wall.

But Giotto learned quickly, and soon was given commissions of his own. His fame grew steadily, and before many years city after city, church after church was calling for his services. Wherever the most ambitious projects for building and decorating cathedrals and chapels were conceived, the talented planners and the wealthy patrons wanted this successful painter. He went to Assisi, at first to assist Cimabue with some decorations in the upper church, which means that he was transported to the very centre of advanced art experiment. He stayed on to add a series of panels of his own. At Padua he spent three years filling the Arena Chapel with his murals. At Florence, at Rome, and at Naples he accepted commissions and left his distinctive works. In the end he had become the intimate of princes and bishops. The King of Naples recorded with pride that Giotto was his friend and guest.

The main surviving monuments to his genius are at Assisi, Padua and Florence. In the upper church at Assisi, built over the tomb of St. Francis, Giotto painted scenes from the life and legendry of the great mystic. Other walls had been painted by Cavallini and by Cimabue. But Giotto best translated into picturing the simple lovable spirit of the saint.



*Giotto Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple*  
[Courtesy Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston]

Where the earlier artists held to traditional themes of the Passion, the Madonna, and allegories of the Church, and trained to a traditional method, made little progress beyond recognized idioms, Giotto created his own versions of the incidents out of his emotion and his observation of the people, men and women exactly like those who had entered, hardly more than a century before, into the actual Franciscan drama. It was he who fixed the method of Franciscan illustration for a whole school of followers. In short,



*Giotto Deposition from the Cross Arena Chapel, Padua  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]*

a generation of painters were to imitate and adapt his creations, substituting them for the types and attitudes and groupings which had for centuries been the Byzantium-derived currency of painting. There is not, let it be noted, unanimity of opinion among the historians and critics regarding this early Assisan series. Some even deny his authorship, though whom else to nominate for the honour is a puzzle.

The origin of the Arena Chapel at Padua is illustrative of the strange ways in which some of the noblest works have been given to the Western world. One Enrico Scrovegno had died with the reputation of having made his fortune out of shameful usury. There was ample ground for questioning his



Giotto *Ascension of St John Evangelist* Santa Croce Church, Florence  
*[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]*

status in purgatory. His son, reckoning that his own position could not but be bettered by gift of a princely chapel in the service of religion, and to the glory of that highest intercessionary figure, the Virgin Mary, while his father's chances would be improved thereby, had built what is now sometimes known as Giotto's Chapel. There is no information as to the easing of the elder Scrovegno's lot—as to whether the gift brought repose for his soul. But countless Christians have uttered something like ecstatic prayer as they left the church after feasting their eyes and their souls on one of the most moving and gracious art exhibits anywhere.

The church is simple in form, with a single hall, infrequently pierced by windows, covered by a barrel vault. Giotto cut the interior into rows of panels, between painted columns, and he and his helpers painted in all thirty-eight pictures, covering the entire wall space. The total effect is colourful and eye-filling, without the overpowering, organ-thundering tones of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel wall and ceiling, but equally moving in a melodious way. The subjects are from the life of the Virgin and the life of Jesus—a continuous serial-story, tragic but tenderly conceived, humanly believable, persuasive.



Taddeo Gaddi *The Presentation in the Temple* Santa Croce Church Florence  
[Alinari photo]

The compositions are notable for that simplicity which Giotto carried over from the Byzantine and Sieneese methods. All his life he remained a master in unifying and setting out the figures of his actors, freed of cluttering circumstance. Architectural backgrounds are frequent, but they are frame and setting, not added subject-matter played up in scientific perspective and competing emphasis. Landscapes when they appear, as rarely they do, behind the figures are laid up in curtain fashion. The mountains are shaped walls and the trees are as flat and conventionalized as those in a Persian miniature.



Giotto *The Resurrection of Drusilla* Santa Croce Church, Florence [Anderson photo]

But the bodies are round and sculptural, and the faces emotionally alive.

Some of the finest of Giotto's murals, although once whitewashed over and badly restored after the uncovering, are in the Santa Croce Church in Florence. Here the mature Giotto, expert illustrator and superb muralist, is represented by pictures a little fuller, with greater depth, than in the Paduan series.

After being honoured at the court of Naples, Giotto was called back to Florence in his old age. The city fathers, wanting a city architect and superintendent of public works, and desiring also the honour accruing from Giotto's presence, secured his return and bestowed on him publicly the title "Great Master."

As if the highest honours in painting were not sufficient to memorialize his genius, the artist turned to architecture and designed the campanile beside the Florentine Cathedral. It is unique in its decorative features, obviously echoing the Gothic language of the North, but adding Southern sensuousness, grace, and rhythmic repetitions. Every visitor to Florence has been haunted by its mysterious loveliness. Beautifully it accents the cathedral group of Santa Maria del Fiore—Our Lady of the Flower.



Just as the lesser painters of Siena afford exquisite pleasure within their little field of melodious panel-pictures, so the Florentine followers of Giotto created a garden rich in unexpected and lovely, at times even gorgeous, paintings. Sometimes they hark back to the Byzantine formalism, approximating to the gold-and-colour ornament of the Siennese artists who so often painted side by side with them in Santa Croce or Santa Maria Novella, or again they echo Giotto himself along the road of the humanized and simplified artistry, or, more exceptionally, they add an individual charm of colouring or composition or emotional feeling to the type product.

Taddeo Gaddi is rather too great a creator to be mentioned merely in a list of Giottesque painters. During twenty-four years he was Giotto's pupil and helper. He elaborated his own backgrounds but not to the point of adding vista-like scenes demanding a change of focus on the observer's part. He held to Giotto's masterly simplification in figure organization and he carried on an Eastern sensuous colouring. His murals in the Santa Croce Church are widely admired.

Bernardo Daddi leaned more definitely toward the miniature virtues. Like the Siennese, he was poetic, decorative, charming. His panel crucifixions and saints, golden-toned and melodiously rhythmic, grace walls in many European and American museums.

Lorenzo Monaco, born in Siena but master of a studio in Florence, carried over something of the miniature ornamentalism and colourfulness of his early homeland, and established the Siennese fragile formalism as a variety within early Florentine practice. He harks back to Simone Martini and Duccio in his use of sensitive and decorative line and controlled plastic melodies. It was he who handed on the Franciscan manner to Fra Angelico.

Andrea da Firenze gives way somewhat to the fashionable overloading of the wall with figures, though continuing in the tradition of primitive flatness and incidental bejewelled ornamentation. Spinello Aretino is known as painter of the frescoes in the sacristy at San Miniato, and for colourful panels in many museums. Giotto (Tomasso di Stefano) returns to Siennese linear rhythms and simpler, more powerful composition. He seems not to have been one of the successful artists of his time, for one of the few details recorded of his life is that even his paints and a stone for grinding colours were finally taken from him by his creditors. It is probable that the stories about him, like the paintings attributed to him, pertain to two or even three artists.

It was fifty years after Giotto's death that Fra Angelico—he who was



Bernardo Daddi: *Vision of St. Dominic* [Courtesy Gallery of Fine Arts, Yale University]

named by his associates "the angelic one" because of his humility and piety—was born. Until his death in 1455, when Florence has made the full swing into realism, learning, and paganism, he carries on painting in the Franciscan spirit, with unmistakable idioms out of the medieval manner.

Fra Angelico has a gentleness and a sweetness of his own. If there were violences and agonized moments and worldly episodes in the Christian legendry that was his only theme-book, he found a way to sublimate them.



Fra Angelico *The Nativity* [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

Adoration sacrifice heavenly glory—these are of the very mood of his art. He was adept at creating a linear harmony and a discreetly colourful melody with his richly draped but simply disposed figures then echoing the rhythms in simplified architectural backgrounds.

There is something of the cloistered monastery spirit implicit in his art. It is as if he a friar made a garden out of the scenes of Christian legendry and forgot so far as a gentle soul may the devils and executioners and tormentors,

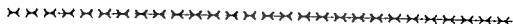


Fra Angelico *The Annunciation* San Marco Museum, Florence  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

peopling it instead with demure Madonnas and saints and Magdalens, among whom there is a Christ radiant and victorious. Martyrs are beheaded without bloodiness. Even the damned in hell are pictured without too distressing sufferings. Perhaps the interweaving plastic melodies soften the reality of these underworld scenes, as certainly they build up into a joyful rhythmic pæan the depicted gardens of heaven.

No one is known to have lived so completely the Christian ecstasies and thoughts and sorrows while painting them. Weeping as he re-created the Crucifixion scenes, kneeling in adoration as he painted the Virgin enthroned, were only two among the familiar reverences which made his painting career a long act of devotion. He painted many of his finest frescoes on the walls of the bare cells of his fellow-monks, not in order that art might colour and ease their environment, but that each brother might awaken upon his pallet and open his eyes to the lesson of the Annunciation, the Adoration, or the story of the Magdalen.

His art was a work of love, his love was that of the innocent-minded. Every painting grew out of a faith that had simplified the world to a few values. Each is endowed with a distinguishing tenderness and naïveté out of his own saintly character. That he carried on, into an era that had come to value more robust and less spiritual virtues in its art, the simplicities and archaisms and the tapestry-like composition—with paper-flat trees and figures hardly more than two-dimensional—is evidence of the vitality of certain æsthetic qualities of primitivism. He closed an era that left to Europe, within the field of painting, a heritage more graceful, sensuously more enchanting, and more musical than any other.



## Florence and the Rebirth of Intellectualism

IN 1345—this would be a year after Simone Martini's death, eight years after Giotto's—citizens of Siena dug from the earth a Roman statue of the Goddess of Love, perhaps a copy of the nude *Venus Anadyomene*. Wonder at the beauty of the figure—"at so great a marvel and so much art," as a reporter of the time put it—ran high. The pagan goddess was carried in joyful procession through the streets and set over the fountain in the city's central piazza. There for twelve years Venus ruled in the very city whose citizens had so often spoken of the Virgin Mary as their Queen, who a generation earlier had similarly carried Duccio's portrait of the Madonna through the same streets with shouts of acclamation and prayers for protection.

But Siena did not prosper under Venus's rule. Misfortunes of every sort were visited upon the city. The plague scourged her, woefully thinning the ranks of her people. Civil war set brother against brother with the sword, until anarchy was nearly reached. Then enemies from without savagely invaded Siena, burned and murdered. In 1357 the citizens gathered at the fountain in the piazza and smashed their beautiful pagan goddess into tiny bits. Nor were they content until they had transported the fragments out of Sienese territory and scattered them on ground belonging to Florence. Thereafter Siena knew pagan art and the pagan world only as works of Satan.

Florence at this time already was awakening to her neo-pagan destiny. The *Venus Anadyomene* would lie for ever untroubled under her ground. Florence, "the Flower," was opening to an emancipation from medieval notions of reverence, from fear of Satan. This new state of mind is called by some *freedom*, by others *scepticism*.

Leonardo da Vinci is generally considered the type figure of the Florentine Renaissance. In his own life and work he sums up its intellectual curiosity, its

passion for scientific research, its calculated realism. He enters into the romantic mood of its patriotism and its civic pride—signs himself always “Leonardo the Florentine”—and joins in the spirit of its pageantry. He is gracious yet dignified, independent yet ready to take orders from the tyrant-princes. He fails to fall in with the fashionable woman-worship of the time, and thus is somewhat apart from the network of personal intrigue and licentious adventure that forms a web upon which the political (and religious) history of the era is woven, yet his own sort of sexual aberrancy, in one so universally honoured and praised, is a symbol of the extent to which Florentine custom had reacted from Franciscan innocence. As to faith, Leonardo’s cold scepticism was even more modern than the contemporary paganism of the princes and courtiers and merchants, who could whole-heartedly embrace church custom while holding to the morals of the thug and the libertine. But scepticism is the master-key to an understanding of the Renaissance.

Behind the decay of faith is the constructive use of the intellect. The scientific spirit emerges. Even art is based upon a way of knowing rather than a way of feeling. It is intellectual research that brings art back to the ancients, and establishes a neo-classicism.

Florence is at the heart of the Renaissance. Few cities, hardly Athens itself or Byzantium, have been so favoured, so strategically placed and so determining in the pageant of Western civilization. “Miraculous Florence” . . .

The Italian spirit had regarded Gothic architecture as an aberration. It was the Italians who dubbed it “Gothic,” meaning to discredit it for all time, as something uncouth and alien to cultured art. It had found little foothold in Italy, it was practised only superficially, as an imported fashion of ornamentation. Not, in the centuries of the Gothic culmination and decline in the North of Europe, was there a crystallization of any other style of building in the Italian city-states. There was no extension of the Franciscan spirit to the building arts. Pisa, with her mixture of Romanesque, Byzantine, and Gothic motives and methods, spells the story of late medieval uninventiveness and vacillation.

The monuments of Florence at the moment of Giotto’s death were the Baptistry and the San Miniato Church, both in the variety of Romanesque known as Tuscan, and some fortress-palaces of a very plain and utilitarian sort, even rudely designed, with a very few high windows and tall battlemented towers. To these Giotto added his Gothic-accented campanile, and

attempted to bring to completion the half-built and style-less cathedral. The campanile is a lovely thing, affording a colourful delight, but it breathes no hint of an emerging Italian type of architecture. Rome in Giotto's time was still a century away from peace and the opportunity to foster architectural innovations. It will be almost a century before Florence, now recognized by all Italian cities as leader in the arts—and holding in actual subjugation Siena and Assisi and Pisa—will know the first Renaissance architect, one Filippo Brunelleschi.

The Florentines must have been asking themselves often in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, when the "new painting" was being practised on every side, when the Pisan sculptors had revived classic realism and were handing a lighted torch to Ghiberti and Donatello: "What is the comparable new way of architecture? How shall we have a style of building at once splendid, rational, and beautiful?"

Perhaps if they had asked only for rationalism, a *logical* sort of construction, and a consequent beauty, all would have been well—a new style would have been born. Instead the impulse expressed itself as a *rebirth*, a Renaissance. The demand for splendour reminded the learned Florentine scholars of Greece and Rome. As the prince-tyrants must have their pageants and their theatricals in approximations of Roman theatres, and in settings supposed to be characteristic of the classic stage, entirely innocent of the traditions of the medieval Christian theatre, so the search for an architecture of sufficient splendour to memorialize the civic pride and Medicean courtliness of Florence carried the builders directly back to Rome. The revival of learning had meant the uncovering of the monuments of the ancient civilization. Antiquity was now worshipped in the arts no less than in the revels of the upper classes. Rediscovery in architecture made invention unnecessary.

A talented imitation, with an exercise of native taste in variation, was here substituted for creation. Architects delved into history, seeking excellencies of effect that they might imitate, instead of beginning with a new purpose, new building inventions and new imagination.

The Renaissance architect arranged his findings from antiquity, says Whitaker, "just as a palæontologist might arrange old bones in a search for some possible variety of animal that Nature had overlooked." Actually the animal he patched together looked a good deal like the Roman. The larger bones were the Roman arch and columns, the lesser ones were the pilaster and half-columns which the uncreative Romans in turn had acquired by



splitting the really functional and therefore rational Greek building-bones

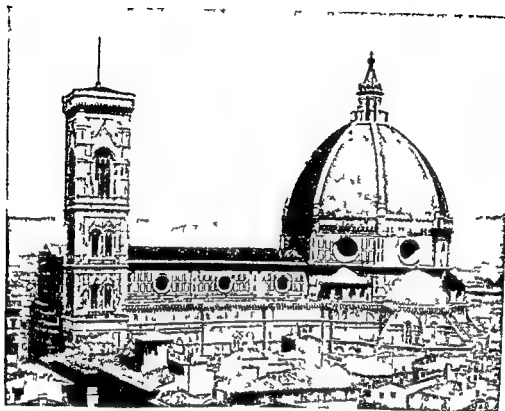
In short, the architect now began to work from inherited models and from a set of rules, not from human necessities and his own feel for tools and materials and suitable plastic forms of building. As for the rules, it was found that a late Roman builder named Vitruvius had codified them, conveniently, back in the first century A.D. He had been certain that Rome had established the one true, orthodox, and final way of constructing and decorating the chief types of architectural monument necessary to man. He explained in detail every method and step, and doubtless believed he had fixed the outlines within which the architecture of cultured man would be practised for ever after.

Centuries later the Renaissance scholar-architects took him at his own word. The authority and supremacy of the "orders of architecture" were re-established, and no one will ever know the extent to which creative building art was damaged in that submission. European, and American, architecture was fixed in the pseudo-classic mould—not without pleasing and ingenious variations, but essentially without original inventiveness—for the entire period from 1420 to 1920.

Even in Brunelleschi's time, before the rediscovered monuments had really been dusted off, and certainly before the practice of a recognizable Renaissance architecture had been established, theorists had analysed and interpreted Vitruvius. Manuals of architecture were circulated, were ready for duplication and international circulation when printing was discovered in this same fifteenth century.

There is something fateful, almost sinister, in the spectacle of these scholar-architects leading and controlling the building-architects. Few art influences can be so neatly traced as this one: the revived classic style pushing its way out to every court in Europe, to Jacobean England, even to South and North America, everywhere causing fashionable kings and bishops and burghers to throw aside all former styles and to build palaces, churches, banqueting-halls, and state capitols in one not-very-vital idiom.

Inigo Jones carried the Italian treatises back with him to England, where he turned the tide of building into purest Renaissance. The books are to be seen in the library at Worcester College, Oxford today. Farther afield, as an instance of the wide diffusion of the Florentine influence, there is in the library of the Santa Barbara Mission on the Pacific Coast of America, a copy of a Spanish edition of Vitruvius's *De Architectura* from which the *padres* were



Cathedral of Florence with Giotto's Tower and Brunelleschi's Dome

able to transmit to their Amerindian workmen enough of the way of Roman arch-and-column building to afford a touch of classic style to the mission church façade. Thus in all directions and over great distances the Renaissance manuals of architecture went out to determine the appearance of buildings in the Western world (In America somewhat later New England and Southern Colonial echoed the influence, by way of Georgian England.) Thus came the spread of that paper architecture which for centuries took the place of inventive building.

Paper architecture triumphed in another sense also. The swing of the pendulum away from medieval communal effort to the extreme of individualism meant the emergence of the architect as a personality distinct from the master-builder. Previously there had been no architects in the modern meaning of the word, as denoting a separate designer, a self-consciously artistic

planner This separate and separated artist now begins, with Vitruvius and the rule-books derived from Vitruvius at his elbow, to make pictures of the building-to-be, on paper

The architect is no longer in any sense builder The builder is no longer architect, indeed, he loses the sense of the whole and is content to have a chart and specifications of his own bit, his own job, be it masonry foundations or interior panelling or a roof This separation will last from Florentine days down to the thirties of the twentieth century, and will be carried to unprecedented extremes as the Industrial Revolution gathers momentum following the mid-eighteenth century Finally, in our own generation, the crystallization of machine-age technics will force the combining of the engineer and the architect into one figure, and will shatter the architect's pretentious artistic aloofness

As for the craftsman who had been independent but profoundly interested in the whole fabric of the cathedral or the guild hall in medieval times, he too in Renaissance times is separated from any large concern with the building to which he contributes His faith and loyalty and imagination had been, in the Gothic centuries, a key to the understanding of the poured-out wealth of sculpturing, colouring, and furnishing, at Chartres and Reims and Paris He was one of a commune, building in group self-expression, one within a brotherhood of artificers who kept a collective eye upon the total rising structure Now he was to work at a point increasingly remote from the constructive and inventive centre This separation, like that of architect from builder, had much to do with the decline of the creative arts incidental to building, and the lack of any architectural synthesis comparable to the Gothic and the Greek, during the four centuries following 1300

In the decades just before and after that date, Florence was teeming with wood-carvers, sculptors, painters, jewellers, but thenceforth the statue and the painting and the silversmith's trinket will be seen less and less in the old architectural setting, more and more as individually displayed artistic items And so begins the struggle of artists and craftsmen to maintain their position in a world that no longer values their work communally Thenceforward the creator is not given a living for his recognized contribution to a commonly inspired monument He is instead put at the disposal of "patrons," and later, failing that, will be at the mercy of something called "popular demand" At first he will, if he has personality and originality and a sound technique, fare well, for the Italian merchant princes and bankers and cardinals

are inordinately rich and void of ornament, as will be the French kings after them, and at times the German, the Spanish, the Russian monarchs afterward.

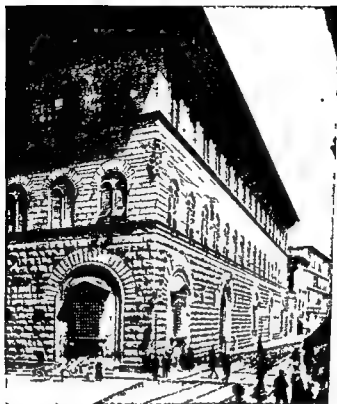
All this—signaling an epochal change in art in the Christian countries—follows upon the decay of faith and the final separation of the artist from monastic protection, upon the reorganization of society under the rule of bankers and merchants. The Medici “princes” of Florence afford the type example, being actual bankers and soon actual rulers of their city—and of its arts. Architecture is the art that suffers most from this new state.

This is not to say that there are no pleasing Renaissance buildings—they exist in great number—or to challenge the claim that this is, in the breadth of its profusion over the earth and the extent of its practice in time, a major world style. It is only to qualify the nature of that style, to suggest that it is the least original of the major types of architecture, least organic, and least exciting. There is no Renaissance building that can conceivably be mentioned with Amiens or Santa Sophia or the Pantheon or the Parthenon. Mostly the monuments exist in parts which must be enjoyed separate from the building as a whole: there is a dome, a façade, a cloister, or a portico of importance.

The dome of the cathedral at Florence is Brunelleschi’s monument. It is known universally as “Brunelleschi’s dome,” almost the first tribute of the sort to an individual architect. It is a beautiful thing in its own right, though wholly unrelated stylistically to the structure of which it is the crowning feature. Fortunately the main building is largely lost to sight, from almost any point of view, near or far, the dome and Giotto’s campanile near by stand up like independent creations.

Brunelleschi’s dome is medieval in type, rather than Roman: the dressing-up with the architectural language of split-columns, arcades, and pediments has not yet come in. But there is a capturing of clarity and an attainment of rhythmic simplicity which signalize a return to the classic ideal. There is something flower-like in the bulk of the dome as seen from without appropriately, since this is the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Flower. One who has lived in Florence can testify how often, in varied light and from numberless vantage-points, the composition has evoked a pleasurable and distinctive response.

The full return to Rome and the real beginning of the revival of classicism are marked rather in the Pazzi Chapel which Brunelleschi designed to be placed within the cloister of Santa Croce Church. The columns, arches, entablature, pedimented doorway, and pilasters—and the general studied look



Michelozzo Medici Palace, Florence [*Alinari photo*]

of the façade—are in the spirit of the neo-classic development. The building is charming, even today it loses nothing by comparison with later work, after five hundred years of Renaissance conformity and variation. If the beauty is only that of a garment not deeply related to the organic truth of the structure, one nevertheless accepts it thankfully, perhaps in the way one repeats, when faced with the fact that an admired woman is essentially and subtly dishonest, ‘Well, she is charming.’

In short, here is the typical pretty Renaissance concoction, indefensibly an architectural mask, but beautifully done once the illogical grounds are overlooked and forgotten.

Here as in the cathedral dome there is a certain freshness, and this is apparent again in the portico of the Foundling Hospital. The round-arched arcade,

so simply rhythmic, open and reposefully horizontal is an example of the use of arcading as a major decorative feature, which will become idiomatic in the Renaissance style as it spreads through Italy, then over all Europe.

The Foundling Hospital and the Pazzi Chapel together, dated 1519 and 1529 respectively, might be offered as a key exhibit, forecasting Renaissance practice in its two main aspects: as return to Roman appearance-dominants, and as introducing a fresh harmonious lightness and clarity. In other monuments, notably the Churches of San Lorenzo and San Spirito, Brunelleschi followed ancient models more closely, they are Roman basilicas with only slight decorative innovations.

When Brunelleschi designed the Pitti Palace, he modified, not too successfully, the older type of urban fortress-dwelling-place with Roman ornamental forms. The palace as a type is better studied in the examples designed by his pupil and follower Michelozzo Michelozzi. Brunelleschi, however, by reason of the inventiveness shown in the cathedral dome, and the distinctive note in the lesser monuments, takes rank as one of the three or four foremost Italian architects.

The Medici Palace, long known as the Riccardi Palace, but recently labelled again with the name of the famous builders, was constructed from plans by Michelozzo in 1430. It is prototype of the urban palace as it will be constructed in and out of Italy for two centuries. It retains certain medieval features, particularly the rough stone or "rusticated" lower walls, and the windows divided by pillar-mullions. But the determining idioms are those borrowed from Rome: the horizontal accents between stories and the heavy overhanging cornice at the top, in place of medieval battlements, and the window-spacing suggesting superimposed arcades. An interior court escapes the severe over-heavy look of the exterior, and is one of the pure expressions of Renaissance taste and method. The details of capital and entablature are copied from an ancient model. The total effect is graceful and learned if a bit dull. The fragile aspect of the columns has been remarked as out of keeping with their function, and the general lightness is antithetical to the aspect of the rest of the building.

Later palaces are more of a piece, because the fortress-like aspect is gradually eased out of the exterior façades and because later architects gain a certain facility in the manipulation and harmonizing of the Roman ornamental language. The Strozzi Palace was to carry on directly the architectural form fixed in the Medici Palace, with some of the lingering medievalisms designed

out, but this was not to be accomplished until considerably later. Meanwhile, the Palazzo Rucellai introduces another Roman way of ornamentation in three rows of pilasters adorning the three stories of the façade, tying it together and lightening its appearance. From then on, for centuries, the useless pilaster will be an incubus upon Western architecture. It sets the seal of Rome firmly upon what was until ten years ago called "modern" building.

The man who reintroduced the pilaster was Leone Battista Alberti, a scholar-architect who had pored over Vitruvius and sought to render Florentine building orthodoxly classic. At Rimini he shortly afterward draped an imitation of a Roman triumphal arch over the front of an old church. This was typical of the spirit of "creative" building as it was now being initiated in the most progressive cities of Italy. The success was repeated at Mantua and elsewhere.

The Florentine antiquarians had done their work so well that imitative adaptation had by 1500 driven out every vestige of invention. The intellectual concept of a revived classicism had then utterly triumphed. In summary, the early Renaissance had known no architecture, the middle Renaissance saw a gradual progression from the partial Romanism (still subject to original variation) of Brunelleschi to the full academism of Alberti. The high or late Renaissance, of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, will see architects vying with each other in rearrangements of the now sanctified Græco-Roman motives. All façades will be topped with cornices and graced with (1) rows of pedimented windows, or (2) superimposed arcades, real or blind—with often a framework of pilasters or engaged columns, and the occasional introduction of a larger complex of features like the triumphal arch. The curious thing here is that the paper design is coldly reasoned, rationalized, intellectualized over, but the structural elements are unreasonably and irrationally distorted and obscured under the studied mask. There will be many pleasingly masked buildings in the sixteenth century, but no movingly organic ones.

The Medicean aristocrats of the fifteenth century used to fill their gardens with exhumed ancient statues, and the local sculptors were invited thither to study and to be imbued with the classic spirit of realism. But two centuries earlier an Italian sculptor in another city had already rediscovered the Roman monuments and initiated the revival of antique forms. Niccola Pisano, whose life fell wholly within the thirteenth century, practised particularly the art of high relief, in crowded panels of figures unmistakably suggested by the narra-



Brunelleschi Pazzi Chapel, Florence [*Alinari photo*]

tive sculptures of imperial Rome. He doubtless had felt too the influence of the naturalism which was then entering the Gothic sculpture in France, though there held strictly within a larger formal synthesis.

Long considered by scholars a Pisan by birth and training, Niccola Pisano is now known to have come from Apulia in Southern Italy, and thus to have had opportunity to see Roman statues where they most abundantly survived. Then too the enterprising Pisans had sacked many a Sicilian and other Mediterranean city and had carried home sculptured marbles along with unsculptured for the building and adornment of their cathedral and baptistry. Some of the figures and groupings in Niccola's panels can be traced directly to the Roman sarcophagi and carved vases still standing in the Pisan Campo Santo. One of his angels obviously wears a Roman toga, and the Virgin in the Nativity is in an attitude said to be traceable to Roman-Etruscan conventions. In any case, in this one artist's work there is a sudden complete reversion from the current Byzantine and Romanesque decorative sculpture to Roman conceptions and method.



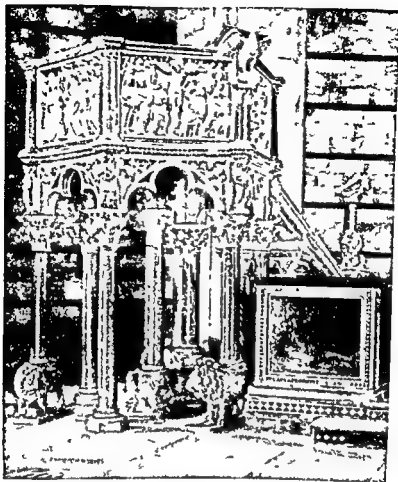
At Pisa, Niccola carved the pulpit in the baptistry, one of the most celebrated sculptural works in Europe. The architectural elements are amazingly mixed, but the dominating sculptural panels are straight Roman, crowded with figures, realistic, dramatic. The pulpit ensemble and the individual panels are effectively rich, opulently decorative. There are hints of some true Renaissance modifications in the way of story-telling—but the whole is essentially revival.

Straightway the Pisan pulpit excited admiration and envy throughout Tuscany, and Niccola Pisano was invited to design and carve a pulpit for the cathedral at Siena. The result is somewhat more elaborate, equally inconsistent architecturally, but equally eye-filling and dramatic. Here the revived antique panel sculpture is seen in several varied interpretations, for the master had brought along assistants and had taught them, each according to temperament and ability, to follow the pattern. Soon, from this centre, the influence goes out in a dozen directions.

Niccola's son, Giovanni Pisano, returns to Pisa to do a pulpit for the cathedral, and later does another for Pistoia, engaging works both, but over-decorated and occasionally melodramatic in subject-matter. It was Arnolfo di Cambio rather who carried the impetus on into the full tide of the Renaissance, for he was a Florentine, and thus was able to convey the message of a revived classicism into an atmosphere soon to be charged with a very passion for antiquity. Nor was the restored realism other than congenial to the humanism which had swept in a mighty wave over Florence.

Arnolfo seems for a time to have trembled on the verge of a sculptural art expressive of the Franciscan spirit—fragile, melodious, and formalized. But his pupils diverted the humanistic trend into other fields. Just as all painting after Fra Angelico must be judged for a set of virtues different from those of the colourful, decorative, plastically controlled panel-painting of the Siennese school—rather by an illustrational and naturalistic canon—so Florentine sculpture, from Ghiberti to Desiderio da Settignano, must be assessed as realism and pretty documentation.

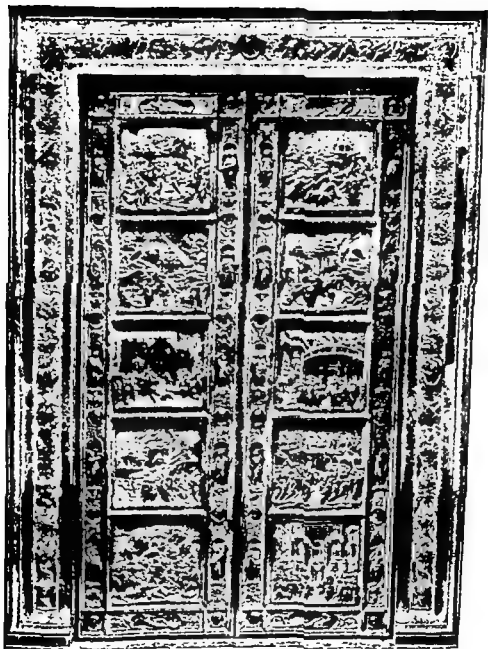
Indeed, from any point of view except that of the extreme realist, the sculpture of the early and middle Renaissance is second-rate and indefensible. To be sure, nothing in the whole range of the art has been so widely and lavishly praised as the works of Ghiberti, Donatello, and the della Robbias. Now, at a time when the tide of realism is receding, it becomes clear that no other school of sculpture has been so enormously over-praised. But because the



Niccola Pisano Pulpit in Baptistry, Pisa  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

swing of the pendulum away from the formally expressive and plastically alive and toward the naturalistic affords an instructive study by contrast, and because photographic realism has its own minor virtues, it is worth while to pause over the Ghiberti doors, the Donatello busts and figures, and the della Robbia plaques

Vasari, a gossip writer of the sixteenth century, whose biographies of Renaissance artists have been very useful to later scholars despite inaccuracies, prejudices, and a provincial sort of nationalism, tells the story of Lorenzo Ghiberti's winning of a competition held to determine what sculptor should



Ghiberti: Doors of Baptistry, Florence  
*[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]*

design the doors of the baptistry in Florence at the opening of the fifteenth century. Ghiberti's trial design for one of the twenty-eight panels exists in a Florentine museum along with one by Brunelleschi, both are so realistic, pictorial, and theatric that there can be no doubt about the full triumph of illustrationalism at this time.

Brunelleschi withdrew—to become the foremost architect of the era. Ghiberti spent the next twenty-two years designing and casting the pair of doors. So pleased were the Florentines that he was then commissioned to execute another pair, to take the place of some then deemed old-fashioned, and he spent another term of twenty-two years on the job.

Andrea Pisano, a follower of Niccola and Giovanni of the same name though unrelated in family, had done that earlier pair of doors for the baptistry, seventy years before. They were moved to a less conspicuous portal, but they remain, when judged by architectural and sculptural standards, more competent and pleasing than the more celebrated Ghiberti compositions. But Ghiberti introduced marvels of a sort unprecedented in the art of sculpture—and very popular. He treated each panel as if it were an easel picture. The amount of narrative and action and casual detail incorporated into the four doors is extraordinary. Trees, mountains, streams, clouds, ships, armies—all are expertly manipulated for pictorial effectiveness. The newly discovered scientific perspective is worked to the utmost of agreeable and surprising effect.

The sculptor himself, writing of the second pair of doors (each bearing five picture panels instead of the fourteen on each of the earlier pair), records that "in some of these ten reliefs I introduced more than a hundred figures, in others fewer. Observing the laws of optics, I succeeded in giving them an appearance of such reality that when seen at a distance the figures seem to be in the round. The nearer figures are largest, while those in the further planes diminish in size, as occurs in Nature."

In the matter of verisimilitude this is a notable advance over the ancients. Western relief sculpture theretofore had presented the figures in equal size except for the arbitrary purpose of emphasizing the importance of a king, as in Assyria, or Christ, as in Byzantine art, or a similarly symbolic figure. Even Niccola Pisano had enlarged the Virgin Mary. But with Ghiberti scientific naturalism is exploited and brought conspicuously into sculptural art.

Vasari described parts of the second doors as "the most beautiful work that has appeared in ancient or modern times." The Florentines have traditionally



Ghiberti *Creation of Adam and Eve The Temptation and The Expulsion*  
Panel in Baptistry door Florence [Anderson photo]

called them 'The Doors of Paradise' as being worthy to grace Heaven itself. Nor has the chorus of similar hyperbolic praise from those partial to realism ceased at any time since.

If one grant that to accomplish in one art the technical feats pertaining to another—that to achieve in bronze the effect of linear flow and spacious background natural to painting constitutes an artistic triumph—Ghiberti's panels are masterpieces. It is easy to mark in them the pictorial and illustrational virtues: pleasingly natural settings, well grouped figure compositions and plen-

tiful, simply organized action. To these may be added the virtuoso manipulation of the space-effects, and a newly competent handling of anatomy—if as yet without marked sense of characterization. But when all is said, the compositions are rich in just those values that are most alien to plastic unity, sculptural roundness, and three-dimensional vitality. The future may yet judge them a marvellous show of misdirected inventiveness.

Incidentally, in Ghiberti's work the return to paganism, or a neo-pagan humanism is signalized by one other detail—the frank and caressing treatment of the nude figure. Since Christian puritanism had initiated a millennium of denial of the body, there had been precious little picturing of the nude for its own sake. Occasionally Christian mythology had permitted the portrayal of the naked—and usually ugly—bodies of temptresses, imps or sinners roasting in Hell. Francis of Assisi, in combating asceticism and mortification of the flesh and teaching the beauty and holiness of the natural, had paved the way for a return to appreciation of the human architecture.

One way and another there is a considerable collection of personable and inviting nymphs in Ghiberti's holy picture-panels of the baptismal doors. We shall see the holy elements rapidly diminish and the sensuously seductive ones increase in Florentine art in the decades following. Curiously enough, although the doors have given Ghiberti the reputation of being an artist "of one masterpiece," he left at least three treatments of the Madonna and Child, two in the full round, which are superior to the illustrational reliefs. They add to the tender and sweet realism a felicity of line and a gracefully flowing treatment of sculptural mass that are legitimately of the stone or metal art.

Donatello surpassed even Ghiberti in the piling-up of natural detail when he turned to relief art, though he was less fortunate in the matters of pictorial composition and suave dramatic flow. But his greater achievements are in the round. With him the realism out of rediscovered Rome and the realism that had been growing out of the late Gothic nature-interest had met. Renaissance sculpture is then fully emergent.

Donatello's portrait busts are hardly less revealing than those left by the surpassing realists of Augustan Rome. For a moment the art based on anatomical study and intent observation seems about to pass over into that modern sort based on psychological analysis. The type-figure that had ruled in the sculptural art for a dozen centuries is overthrown in favour of character portrayal.

Donatello had spent years of study in Rome, but after his return to Florence



Donatello *The Gatta melata Statue Padua* detail  
 [Anderson's photo courtesy Italia's Tourist Information Office]

The faults of over-sweetness and sentimentality that had grown on Donatello find their apotheosis in the wholly feminine Luca della Robbia. The realism of the time no longer has the surprise of character revelation. The naturalism is standardized. All the cherubic children—and they abound—are alike. The madonnas and angels seem studied from one local girl. The panel picturing of Ghiberti already weakened in Donatello slides even further into a frank wash-drawing technique.

Luca della Robbia at first worked in marble devising a choir gallery with reliefs of singing boys that rival Donatello's in the Florence Cathedral. "The



Verrocchio Colleoni Monument Venice  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

most wonderful singers imaginable you can almost hear them," comments Lorado Taft. Later Luca developed the pretty art of polychrome ceramic sculpture which is more especially associated with his name. Luca's nephew Andrea carried on the tradition, and although less accomplished as a sculptor-picturer, he did some *bambini* and *madonnas* that became immediately popular and have been duplicated endlessly. The della Robbia plaques are to be seen in the original in every museum great or small, and in competent reproductions in every "art shop."





Donatello *Bust of Nicola da Uzzano* National Museum Florence  
 [Anderson photo courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

about 1406 he seems to have clung for a time to certain medievalisms. Ten years later, however by the time of the 'bald pate' or Pumpkin-Head statue in a niche on the campanile, he had adopted every idiom of Roman realism including the wooden drapery (naturalistic treatment of draperies in stone or metal cannot but result in a heavy stiff effect), the exact photographing of every anatomical idiosyncrasy, and a general air of cruelly analytical recording. In the same vein and more arresting because the interest is concentrated

in the head, is the polychrome bust which may be of Cicero or one of Donatello's fellow-citizens named Niccola da Uzzano. In it Renaissance sculpture reaches a culmination of realistic portraiture.

But Donatello was equal to the task of carrying the new passion for naturalism into every sculptural field. A relief of the Annunciation in Santa Croce Church shows the Virgin as a perfectly photographed gracious lady of the *Quattrocento*, listening to a very human angel. The piece is inordinately praised alike by Vasari and by twentieth-century writers who unqualifiedly approve of lifelikeness, who consider it the prime quality in art. It is a perfect example of the dispersion of sculptural values, and of the use of every superficial trick of appeal. Somewhat more can be said for the famous reliefs of the choir gallery in the cathedral at Florence, the architectural features confining better the complicated, even exuberant movement of the panels, and affording a rich impression, in the tradition of the antique Roman sarcophagi.

The great equestrian statue of Gattamelata in Padua is completely lifelike, though it lacks the spirit of Verrocchio's counterpiece at Venice. The head is exceptionally impressive. Of the other free-standing statues there are numerous ones labelled as masterpieces. The ones with youthful subject-matter are best, perhaps because when art becomes a transcript from nature, a physical transcript, the aged model usually brings ugliness. The artist having eschewed creativeness, having transferred all interest to the model, does well to choose subjects in themselves widely appealing. The head of the *John the Baptist* and that of the youthful *St. George* are outstandingly pleasing and humanly appealing.

To the writer the statue most universally praised among Donatello's works, the youthful *David*, is, despite the pretty body, intolerably insipid as sculpture, it is sentimentally literary, over-detailed, weak. The incidental relief on the helmet of the severed head of Goliath deals with the triumph of love. This unrestrained indulgence in detail for its own sake—the ivy leaves on the hat, the flowing tresses, the piled-up trophies at the base—is, according to the judgment of today, unsculptural. The same fault is carried to its ultimate excess in the famous *Judith and Holofernes* in the Piazza della Signoria.

Perfection is a word commonly used to describe Donatello's works. He is still the idol of the teachers of art in many schools and studios. But in the larger view, it becomes clearer year by year that Donatello's importance is that of a culminating figure in an era of the decadence of sculpture as a creative art.



Laurana: Bust of a Neapolitan Princess State Museum, Berlin  
 [Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

A contemporary of the della Robbias, Andrea del Verrocchio, returned to a scientific realism and preserved a certain masculinity. His *David* is a bonily boyish boy, as contrasted with the prettily androgynous figure by Donatello, though it is equally far from typical sculptural cleanness and hardness. His masterpiece is the over-life-sized equestrian statue known as the *Colleoni* in Venice, one of the finest things of the sort in European art history. Here there is a return to sculptural massiveness. The simple relationship of parts and the dynamic organization are notable. The dramatic strength has served as inspiration to generations of makers of equestrian monuments.



*Desiderio da Settignano Bust of a Young Woman  
Bargello Florence*

Contemporary with Ghiberti there had been at Siena a figure more important than any of the Florentines as a forerunner of that one genius of Renaissance art-in-marble Michelangelo. This was Jacopo della Quercia. He saw sculpture as a monumental rather than a pretty art. Even in devising the reliefs currently so popular he maintained a largeness of conception and strength in modelling. There is an amplitude in the panels around the doorway of San Petronio Church at Bologna which is repeated in some rather battered fountain figures at Siena the whole exhibit marking this exceptional artist as one of the few born sculptors of the Renaissance.



Jacopo della Quercia *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve* Church of San Petronio Bologna  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

Jacopo had been one of the competitors for the commission to design the baptistry doors at Florence and one may wonder whether Italian sculpture might not have followed a more creative course if so masculine an artist had then been chosen instead of the water-colourist Ghiberti. It is known that



Jacopo della Quercia *Creation of Adam* Church of San Petronio Bologna  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

Michelangelo, the transcendent artist of the following century, studied to good purpose Jacopo's works at Bologna. His virtues of massive sculptural conception and plastic vitality seem not to have been discovered by the other and lesser Renaissance artists—or critics.

In Florence the best was past long before the end of the fifteenth century

The della Robbia family continued to capitalize on the popularity of the coloured terra-cotta plaques. The Rossellinos carried on the work of prettifying both free-standing statues and picture reliefs. Some of the sweetest and most natural angels known are found among their works. Mino da Fiesole and Benedetto da Maiano practised in that tradition too, but are better known for certain cruelly naturalistic portrait busts, done in uncompromising Roman photographic sincerity. Pollaiuolo completes the destruction of truly sculptural values in free-standing statues, adding melodramatic stress and strain to observed anatomic realism.

Recently there has been an appreciative revival of interest in the low-relief harmonies of Agostino di Duccio. His panel pictures with raised figures exhibit an appealing linear grace, and his sense of space-filling composition is better than that of his contemporaries. But the values are those borrowed from another art, and he plucks the sentimental note to excess, according to present judgments. Less overdone is the sweet and feminine grace in the plaques and statuettes by Desiderio da Settignano. They depend upon the grace and sweetness of the model, but they retain sculptural integrity. Another who prettified the stone, with appealing smoothness and fluency, was Francesco Laurana, who is sometimes placed at the very head of the list of successful Renaissance portraitists.

In summary of the ultimate disservice of the Florentines to the art of sculpture it may be said that they progressively weakened and feminized it. Except when Michelangelo comes back from Rome to work on the Medici tomb figures the art will not be heard of again in the city on the Arno—unless one count the trinkets manufactured by Cellini.

Aside from size, the best thing in Italian sculpture of the *Quattrocento*, excepting Jacopo della Quercia's works, is a series of medals by Pisanello of Verona. He is a world master of miniature relief design. With him style is born again. The intention is frankly decorative, not representational. The problem of filling space, of the abstract architecture of the design within a given area, is beautifully solved. The main motives are strong, dominating, and dynamically contrived. After reports of so much weakened and washy sculptural design, it is pleasant to end the account of early Italian sculpture on this note of an art which, if small, is stiffly stylized, masculinely strong—and everlastingly attractive.

It may be instructive to add a quotation on the broad way in which the



Medals by Pisanello

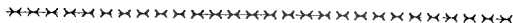
[Henry Nocq and Leon Marotte *Les Médailles d'Antonio Pisano dit le Pisanello*]

artist worked in the era of Medicean magnificence and patronage of the arts. As contrasted with the simple straightforward devotion of the Gothic sculptor to a single task or a single type of art—a picture of the hustle and bustle of the artist's life in fifteenth-century Florence is significant. It is taken from Rachel Annand Taylor's colourful book entitled *Leonardo the Florentine*, and describes the life of Verrocchio as sculptor-in-ordinary to the Medici.

Much employed by Lorenzo, he made Piero de' Medici's beautiful tomb in San Lorenzo—red porphyry and green marble on great lion's paws with twisted thorny



bronze foliage. He had wrought on the Forteguerri tomb. He lifted the ball of gilded copper on the dome, and set the Cross over the ball. For the Medici he was always at work, tombs, statues, armour, pageantry, ex-votos, busts of both brothers, Giuliano and Lorenzo—Lorenzo with graven harpies on his breast. He did many things cheerfully, for, oppressed by poverty and duty to his kin, he had known himself so thwarted that he could not even ply for want of metals the trade of goldsmith. He fashioned the silver hind for Giuliano's helmet, he had made breastplates for Galeazzo Maria Sforza, he painted standards and devised gilded steel for the tournaments, he cast a church-bell for the monks of Vallombrosa. In an inspired and radiant mood he charmed from some garden-nursery of Olympus that immutable *putto* with the dolphin for Careggi, and he restored the antique red marble bust of Marsyas, using the white veins in the stone for the sinews. He made clasps and cups with devices of foliage and fabulous beasts, acanthus and pinions alive and lovely, but with that hint of natural malice in them which becomes a conscious threat of danger in Leonardo's spined wings and leaves. He had much of his pupil's versatility, but none of his disdains, for he was a goldsmith and intaglio-maker, even bell-caster, as well as painter, musician, and geometrician.



## Florentine Painting

### *The Scientific Spirit and the Pageantists*

GIOTTO had already established painting as the outstanding art of Italy before the Renaissance had been fully initiated. His humanism had brought to the picturing art a new emotionalism out of familiar life. Yet he is more often termed a late medieval artist. The stream of Franciscan painting, with its simple intimate figuring of Christian subjects within the formalism and glow inherited from Italo-Byzantine practice, continues in "the School of Giotto" in fourteenth-century Florence, and even through the first half of the fifteenth century in the lovely but lonely creations of Fra Angelico. Nevertheless, humanism had then taken a turn, particularly under secular patronage, toward a fuller portrayal of man on the one hand, and a fuller celebration of his emancipated neo-pagan way of living on the other. Progress may be traced along the two lines—scientific naturalism and a joyous pageantism. The lines flow together at times, in an Uccello or a Botticelli.

The scientific spirit was in the air. It acted upon painting as a general impulse toward the recording of life "more truly," and specifically toward the study of anatomy, of light and shade, and of perspective. Knowledge of the bones and muscles and sinews under the skin, it was thought, must add to truth. Soon the painters will be posing figures in attitudes that make for a knowing display of muscle and bone articulation. Likewise, perspective backgrounds will be insisted upon till the two-dimensional picture field is sadly punctured and violated. Shadows will be sketched naturally.

If the new knowledge of anatomy and optics at first all but destroyed the painting as formal organization, it represented a step toward the artists who would masterfully combine realism *and* organization. Michelangelo, Titian, and Tintoretto. And there are many variations that delight the eye and satisfy



Masaccio: *Expulsion from Paradise*, Santa Maria della Carmine, Florence  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

the mind in the Florentine painting of the revolutionary and transitional fifteenth century.

Adam and Eve in the *Expulsion from Paradise* by Masaccio, first of the great Italian realists, are just a naked man and woman, nicely photographed, showing all the signs of grief, he with hands over eyes, she with distressful upturned face and hands stretched to cover those parts of her body of which she has just become self-consciously conscious. The human actors are real, observed. But the garden in which they are driven out is a landscape of the imagination, a decorative



*Crucifixion* attributed to Masolino  
Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

relatively conceived. And indeed the young Masaccio vacillates between his new-found photographic realism and the pictorial conventions of his predecessors. He might have been one of the greatest of European painters if he had not died at the age of twenty-seven, in 1428. As it is, he is known as the initiator of Italian scientific realism. He is almost the first artist to define subjects by natural light and shadow.

Up to this time contour, as emphasized by line, had been the major means of representation of solids in a painting. Giotto had introduced sculpturally rounded figures, but without regard to the science of light, and he had continued to play linear harmonies in the mode inherited from Duccio. Now Masaccio compared existing art with nature—and could not find any justification for lines. He set painting in the way of tonal photographic representation.

Masolino, who painted before Masaccio and is supposed to have been the latter's teacher, made strides toward "natural" statement, particularly in nudes—though possibly Masaccio had shown the way, for teacher outlived pupil by two decades. Altogether Masolino was hardly a first-class painter in either his earlier more or less medieval style, or in the later realistic one. He is significant chiefly as the possible co-originator of scientific naturalism. An occasional Giottesque panel, like the *Crucifixion* in the Maitland Griggs Collection, New York, is an exception, affording deep visual enjoyment through the linear harmonies employed by Giotto and Bernardo Daddi.

Andrea del Castagno was next to learn the lessons of anatomy and optics. He continued the methods of representation by natural shading, and mastered perspective—of which he made too much show—but his treatment was wooden as compared with the subtle tonalities of Masaccio. And he is overshadowed by his contemporary, Filippo Lippi, a merry monk who just missed being a very great contributor to the progress of art.

Nothing could be more illuminating, as showing the conflict between the old artistic (and ecclesiastic) traditions and the new ideals of liberalism and realism, than the story of this natural libertine cooped within the walls of a monastery and constrained to paint instructive church pictures when his heart is devoted to the fleshly world outside. The reader will remember how Robert Browning's poem, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, summarizes the conflict and brings out the painter's Florentine philosophy. He has been out on the streets making a night of it (his amorous adventures are fully chronicled by Vasari), and, being taken up by the police, explains how he painted the monastery walls with Bible pictures, but incorporating "every sort of monk" and "folks at church" and "some poor girl." But—

The Prior and the learned pulled a face  
And stopped all that in no time. How? What's here?  
Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!  
Faces, legs, arms and bodies like the true  
As much as pea and pea! it's devil's-game!

Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!  
 Rub all out, try at it a second time

And Fra Lippo is made to summarize his passion for the real in these words.

The beauty and the wonder and the power,  
 The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,  
 Changes, surprises—and God made it all!

Why not do as well as say—paint these  
 Just as they are, careless what comes of it?  
 God's works—paint anyone, and count it crime  
 To let a truth slip

In Filippo Lippi's paintings it is not only that the interest in the real detail and in individualized people gets in the way of creative conception, but that a certain mechanical marshalling of parts is evident, and a rather too-hard exactitude of rendering. Among the most appealing of his pictures is an early one of *Mary Kneeling before the Infant Jesus*, now at Berlin. The Virgin is obviously an observed local girl—she might be the "sweet angelic slip of a thing" of the poem—and God and Joseph are photographically exact characterizations of real old men. But there is a freshness about the whole and an organizational unity that lift it above the general run of Filippo Lippi's work. One look at the virgin figure indicates the extraordinary advance since Giotto's time in the matter of naturalistic rendering. In others of his pictures, particularly the *Virgin and Child* in the Pitti Gallery, there is evidence that the monk-artist had studied well the new science of perspective.

The coldly scientific tendency found its culmination in the very exact works of Piero della Francesca: not a Florentine at first, but come as a young painter to spend a few years at the centre of experiment and progress in his art. He mastered anatomy, perspective, and the new tonal method of representation, and he often added extensive landscape backgrounds or elaborate architectural ones. If this were all, he might be dismissed as merely a link between Masaccio and Leonardo. But Piero added to these advances in naturalism an exceptional gift in the field of abstract picture-design. That he consciously studied balance, weight distribution, and space division at a time when formal design had badly retrogressed and the virtues of "the natural" had been substituted, is made obvious in numerous paintings: so much so that recent studies in pictorial composition and plastic organization have greatly increased his reputation. Cold and undramatic as his work generally is, there are subtle adjustments and a sort of pictorial architecture that afford



Filippo Lippi *Virgin and Child* Pitti Gallery, Florence  
 [Anderson photo courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

an exceptional pleasure. Some portrait busts perfectly set in the frames, with melting landscapes in the background are outstanding

In some of Piero's canvases and frescoes there appear bits of ornamental enrichment and processional pageantry which suggest the advisability of pausing in this chronicle of growing Italian realism to trace the second stream of development—that which was termed at the opening of the chapter, "pageantism" If the naturalism of Masaccio and Filippo Lippi and Piero



Filippo Lippi: *Mary kneeling before the Infant Jesus* State Museum Berlin  
[Photo courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

is a direct outgrowth of the Florentine scientific spirit this other superficially decorative tendency is traceable to a pagan philosophy and a sumptuous way of life in those circles wherein the artists found patronage

Back in the time of Giotto's immediate followers in the mid fourteenth





Gentile da Fabriano *The Flight into Egypt* Uffizi Gallery Florence  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

century, a painter sculptor-architect known as Orcagna had turned a little away from the emotional humanism of Giotto and toward a dramatic building up of crowded patterns of figures. The device was not new. It was in line with the decorative tendency out of Siena and indeed the Byzantine-derived glow of colour was continued in it. Several of the Giottesque painters had leaned in this direction particularly Andrea da Firenze, and so had Ambrogio Lorenzetti but it was an Umbrian, Gentile da Fabriano, who first carried the rich panoramic method to a culmination. His only major surviving work, the *Adoration of the Magi* in the Uffizi Gallery, shows some incidental absorption of the realistic tendencies of the painter's contemporaries. The Siennese and Giottesque stiffness is gone. But something of the grace, the flowery freshness, and the embroidered richness remains. To this Gentile adds movement and the quickness of life. The pageant is still of the Church, but it is alive with the energy of Florentine secular 'society'. Gentile could do an episodic picture too and one not unworthy to stand beside those of his gifted contemporary, Fra Angelico, as is to be verified by the *Flight into Egypt* of the predella of the *Adoration*.

Paolo Uccello is the next great figure in the line of dramatic painters. Uccello became, however, so doctrinarily engrossed with the problems and effects of scientific perspective that his pictures are likely to ask the eye—so



Gentile da Fabriano *Adoration of the Magi* Uffizi Gallery Florence  
 [Anderson photo courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

to speak—to pause and marvel at the clever way in which a complex of lines leads up to an accent in deep space, or at an animal perfectly foreshortened. It is said that Donatello (who suffered from another fashionable obsession) remonstrated with Uccello saying “Ah Paolo, with this perspective of yours you are sacrificing the substance for the shadow.”

Before going on to the last great figure among the panorama-painters, Benozzo Gozzoli, it is well to recall an individualist, already noted as a master of medal-design, Pisanello of Verona. He has generally been underestimated by historians. His work gives notable pleasure to the observer whose faculties are open to an appreciation of highly stylized art. His rich decorativeness is combined with consummate delicacy of touch, and his method of laying up the elements of the picture flat mark him as kin to the painters of the Far East. The harmonious miniatures of Persia and the formalized landscapes of China are hardly more expertly flattened. His treatment of animals too,

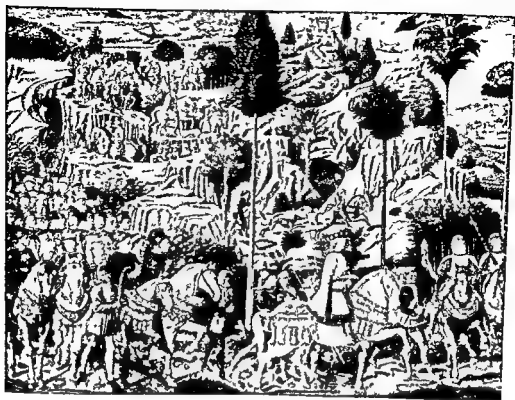


Pisanello *St. George Liberating the Princess of Trebizond* Church of Santa Anastasia Verona [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

as seen in the allegory of *St. Eustace* in the National Gallery, London, seems essentially Oriental.

Someone has said that Pisanello was a master painter of individual figures and objects but that he had little sense of composition and organization. Rather, his tapestry-like disposition of simplified and emphasized figures with incidental patterned areas, is a departure from realistic practice, but beautifully effective. Whether in the sumptuous frescoes in Santa Anastasia Church at Verona, or in a narrative panel like that in London, or the simple portrait of Lionello d'Este at Bergamo, the rare qualities in the rare pictures by Pisanello afford a distinctive and full-bodied enjoyment.

Fra Angelico even while remaining his own inimitable self, a rare last Franciscan lingering on into Medicean days, borrowed from both the realism of Masaccio and the pageantism of the panoramists. It was strangely one of his pupils who went over the whole way to the pageantists in the fullest secular interpretation. Benozzo Gozzoli, instead of carrying on the still faintly medieval courtliness of Gentile da Fabriano and Pisanello, goes over to illustrational



Benozzo Gozzoli *Journey of the Kings, first episode* Medici Palace, Florence  
 [Anderson photo courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

recording of the actual pageantry now being staged in the daily lives of the social princes of Florence.

Every visitor to that city is taken immediately to the Palazzo Medici to see the paintings of the story of the *Three Kings* in the private chapel constructed for Piero de' Medici (the Gouty) by Michelozzo in 1444-1452. Here Benozzo Gozzoli spread on three walls processional pictures of the journeys of the Kings to Bethlehem, in clever panoramic illustrations. The presentation is of a pageant in which local celebrities take part, and every detail is studied from the environs of Florence and the people of the Medicean circle. There are no fewer than five members of the Medici family among the nobles of the cavalcade, and Lorenzo (later to be "the Magnificent") is one of the Kings.

The pageant of the early Renaissance have travelled the distant - and the - of the Florentines and Simone

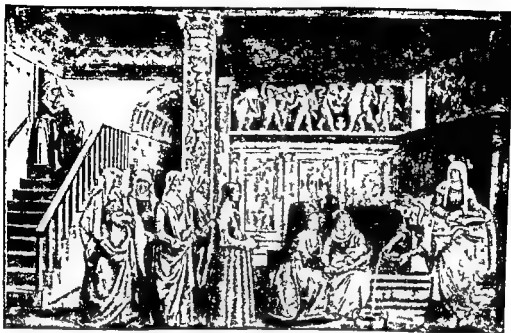
Martini to depiction of the actual panorama of neo-pagan Florentine life. The *Three Kings* marks arrival at a new sort of courtly realism. The art of it is rich and artificial because the fashionable life of Florence is so, not because the artist enriches and formalizes and thereby renders the picture artificial.

As a matter of fact Gozzoli is a distinctly second-rate painter in any ultimate creative sense. He scores heavily by reason of the wealth of interest in the life he has illustrated. He presents the pomp and circumstance of his time spontaneously, with a great deal of red-velvet colouring, and with the page boys and lap-dogs added. Others less celebrated are perhaps superior in pictorial invention—Domenico Veneziano and Pesellino among them.

Some artists are known almost wholly for their paintings on the *cassoni* or trousseau chests which were fashionable as presents to young girls, or for decorated salvers presented when a young mother gave birth to a child, or for "wainscot panels" specially hung up during festive occasions. The very nature of these settings afforded the artist an excuse for finally escaping from religious imagery into a treatment of themes in keeping with the luxurious and decorative court life.

The subjects on the *cassone* panels are scenes from sporting life—racing, jousting, and hunting—and allegorical or legendary episodes, and actual pageants and parties. The salvers may duplicate these themes, or treat birth itself symbolically or in an historical instance, or celebrate love. The "triumphs" that formed a main motive in Florentine poetry and drama, immortalized by Petrarch and made visually eloquent in pageant and tableau on the Renaissance ballroom stages, come into painting here. They will be exploited in larger paintings by Piero della Francesca, Mantegna, and many others. *The Triumph of Love*, or of *Beauty*, would be exceptionally in place on a bride's *cassone*, and *The Triumph of Fame* on a salver celebrating the birth of a Medicean heir. Pesellino's paintings on bridal chests in particular are rich illustrations of luxurious Florentine custom, and of colourful triumphal processions.

At this time there were artists who were carrying on the work of scientific investigation and recording, while others were bringing together the naturalistic and the decorative currents. Pollaiuolo introduced a nervous and at times melodramatic realism, and is widely praised by the intellectualists for taking a further step in accurately reproducing life as it is seen. He was the first to dissect corpses for the advancement of art. Verrocchio is less at ease as painter



Ghirlandaio *Nativity of the Virgin* Church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

than as sculptor, his rather hard style of realistic picturing is the better known because he was the teacher of Leonardo da Vinci, whose mannerisms are foreshadowed in the elder man's figures

Where the two currents flow together Andrea Mantegna, not a Florentine but a Paduan, stands prominent. His documentation is convincing but over-exact, and his effects of crowded richness are too obviously obtained by the loading-in of architectural detail, garlands, banners and rich stuffs. There is a wooden fixity in his faces and figures—almost like wood-carvings—albeit they are faithfully studied from life. Nevertheless, in a picture in the tradition of the masque-like triumphs, the *Parnassus* in the Louvre, he transcends his own usual limitations and brings to a culmination realistic picturing of classic legendry. His colour sometimes approaches Venetian opulence. Luca Signorelli suffers from a similar hardness of manner, though less bound by the limitations of the line-draughtsman.

Domenico Ghirlandaio completes this trio of contemporaries who academized the realism which had been a free medium for Masaccio and Pol-

laniuolo There is too much in nearly all of Ghirlandajo's frescoes and panels, even in simple portraits Perhaps the best single work of his is the so-called *Nativity of the Virgin*, a fresco in the Church of Santa Maria Novella But it is significant that the nativity incident is pushed to one side and chief place given to a portrait of Lusa Tornabuoni, daughter of the donor of the frescoes, and her retinue It is obvious too that the stairway in perspective was of more account in the artist's reckoning than any religious sentiment that might have been conveyed It is illuminating that elsewhere Ghirlandajo transported the nativity of Jesus out of the traditional humble place, manger or cave, and stageset the incident amid the decorated columns of a ruined palace (At this time no landscape-gardening is stylish unless architectural ruins are introduced)

Toward the end of the fifteenth century there came such a wealth of competent, if uninspired, painters that none but a specialist need pretend to remember their names The museums are rather too well stocked with their works But there are critics who are partial to Filippino Lippi, son of Filippo, for his showy and glamorous compositions, which later slipped over into sentimental and melodramatic effusions, in a darkened painting method Piero di Cosimo was more solidly constructive, particularly in some vigorous portraits, which might be cited as epitomizing the century-long progress toward persuasive reproductive reality In another direction, where he gave play to his imagination, he created some strange and charming mythological scenes Cosimo Tura, when he restrained a tendency toward overelaboration, achieved a dryly finished technique—and remains a world master of exact drawing and rhythmic surface composition

Lorenzo di Credi more definitely sacrifices plastic values to an indulgence in perspective vistas and over-exact depiction, but his carefully posed figure compositions are graceful and pleasing, and his colouring less harsh than that of many of his contemporaries Pietro Vanucci, better known as Perugino (because he was from Perugia), was in the main line of scientifically studied advance, his mechanical composing and intellectual mannerisms being particularly marked He helped to develop landscape, though there is as yet no separate landscape painting in the Western world, only background settings for figure compositions One of Perugino's pupils, Pinturicchio, was to refine upon this feature, and to move forward also in a graceful if at times over-feminized figure treatment But a much younger apprentice of Perugino, Raphael was to overshadow all others on that road



Piero di Cosimo *Hunting Scene* Detail [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

Meanwhile, Florentine painting had reached the fifteenth-century culmination in two figures: Leonardo da Vinci, who summarized in a slight, exquisite body of works the achievements and limitations of the intellectual method, and Botticelli, who picked up the exactitude of drawing and emotionalized humanism of his predecessors and went on to poetize his subjects, and to clothe his aristocratic nymphs in lovely Grecian garments. These two men may be considered the ultimate figures in the two main currents of Florentine advance.

When Savonarola was cruelly burned to death at the stake in the Piazza della Signoria in 1498, Sandro Botticelli, it is said, swore he would never again paint portraits of the mistresses of the Medici, and he hurried to burn all his nude studies. During the lifetime of the great Dominican prophet, Botticelli seems to have sided with the *Arrabbiati*, or foes of the churchman. Perhaps he had heard Savonarola, in sermons from the cathedral pulpit, castigate the dwellers in courts and palaces that "give shelter to rinals and malefactors." The preacher had denounced the love of oratory and poetry, adding "In the mansions of the great prelates and lords . . . you will find



them all, with books on the humanities in their hands, telling one another they can guide men's souls by means of Virgil Horace, and Cicero " Savonarola exhorted the Florentines to turn back to Christ instead Speaking approvingly of the older pictures on the church walls, he justly indicted the later ones—"images of false gods or portraits of the first women you meet in the street " And he exclaimed "Painters, you do ill, you bring vanity into the churches you vest the Blessed Virgin as if she were a common woman . And what shall I say to Christian painters who represent nude figures'

There had come a day thereafter when the Medicean overlords were driven from the city, and Savonarola briefly ruled, although as the inscription on the Palazzo Vecchio had it, "Christ is King of Florence " Even public celebrations were made religious, and the carnival in 1497 ended with a huge bonfire acclaimed as "the pyre of vanities," upon which were heaped all the symbols of worldliness—and books, statues, and pictures Still Botticelli seems to have been unregenerate Only the shock of the killing of Savonarola a year later, when the fanatic preacher had pointed out that the Pope's court was corrupt and licentious, could arouse the fashionable painter into realization of the real evils intertwined with his success

Botticelli had been in especial the painter-interpreter of the cult of neo-paganism, of the life of those who triumphed by the intellect, who consciously worshipped beauty Plato was their mentor—Savonarola had said pithily "An old woman knows more than Plato about Faith"—but at the court the Greek ideals were not much more than a cloak A certain artificiality and superficiality lie over even the loveliest of Botticelli's allegories There is this to be said however if a revived classicism had made architecture and sculpture dull and imitative, it imparted to this one painter's work a welcome lightness and freshness The architects and sculptors unfortunately had actual Greek or oftener Roman models to copy from There were no Greek paintings So Botticelli drew his art from some dream of his own, bathed it in the glow of the imagined art of Athens and Elysium and the Greek Isles It is redolent of the fresh spirit of Greece, not its exhumed relics It is the sweetest and most exquisite flower of neo-classicism out of all the periods of revival

In the allegories and tableaux and festival pieces Botticelli disposes nymphs and goddesses in Parnassian hills and fields or shows Venus rising from the sea But the figures and faces are those of well known Florentine ladies oftener Simonetta, mistress of Giuliano de' Medici (Of the meeting of



Botticelli *The Birth of Venus* Uffizi Gallery, Florence  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

Sandro Botticelli and this lovely Simonetta, and how she consented to pose for him in the nude, one should read the pretty and highly romanticized account in Maurice Hewlett's *Earthwork out of Tuscany*.) Sometimes the pictures were doubtless painted in memory of some actual tableau seen on the stage of the palace ballroom, and in these cases the portraits of courtiers and courtesans would be in the day's work. *Primavera* or *The Allegory of Spring* is supposed to have been such a memento of a pageant episode. In others it was a matter of the artist's paying compliments, or hiding double meanings behind classical allusions. At least once portraits of Giuliano and his lady-love appear in the guise of Mars and Venus, because forsooth the lady is still another man's wife and a formal portrait of the two would hardly be proper.

Except for a sort of golden glow, Botticelli's colour is not important. He is rather a draughtsman, a master of line. His sense of proportion is uneven. But a great deal of his work is fresh and pretty—and immensely popular. When he turned to religious painting after the burning of Savonarola, his style hardened somewhat—but at last, if only briefly, Greece measurably

his mind conceived of as real—the observed, dissected reality—and he penetrated toward the spiritual only a very little way, in a literary manner. He made his landscape backgrounds and the expressions on portrayed faces “mysterious,” but of the truer mystic values there is scarcely a trace.

There are very beautiful qualities in Leonardo's paintings, within the field determined by his approach and his method. He was above all a superb draughtsman. He brought in a consistency in the dramatic treatment of reality. In a revealing treatise on the art of painting, he wrote “What should be asked first in judging whether a picture be good is whether the movements are appropriate to the mind of the figure that moves.” His own advance in this matter can be illustrated by comparison of his *Virgin of the Rocks* or his *Last Supper* with treatments of similar themes at the hands of Ghirlandajo, Verrocchio, and Perugino, with their comparatively static, individually conceived figures.

Leonardo made advances also in compositional effectiveness, though his pyramidal construction suggests a single formula rather than a universal principle. Similarly he idealizes the human face, but in a single type. He completes—to an extent never surpassed—the conquest of light-and-shade as a means of exact delineation. His emphasis by lighting, although not so dramatic and plastically alive as will be Rembrandt's, is precise, harmonious, and appealing. There is a grace about everything he touches.

Two of the most famous paintings in the world are from Leonardo's hand: the portrait in the Louvre known as *Mona Lisa*, and *The Last Supper*, a fresco on the wall of the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. Only two other major works undisputedly by him are extant: the *Virgin of the Rocks*, in the National Gallery, London, and the *St. Anne with Virgin and Child* in the Louvre. Of these four the *Mona Lisa* is least interesting, but the enigmatic expression on the lady's face has teased observers into writing miles of speculative comment. One may study here Leonardo's one form of compositional structure: the pyramid; his one atmospheric landscape background, his one idealized face. There is less sharpness in the drawing, but no less the usual delineation by lighting. *The Virgin of the Rocks* and the *St. Anne* are equally typical of his perfection of statement, his compositional method, and the lighting technique, and more illustrative of his psychological and dramatic planning.

But it is in *The Last Supper* that the dramatic action is supremely exemplified. The way in which individual movement is worked into the plan



Leonardo da Vinci *St. Anne with Virgin and Child* Louvre  
[Archives Photographiques]

of composition is masterly. The architectural features also aid in centring the observer's attention on the head of Christ. It is a masterpiece of scientific and mechanical picture construction and of realistic religious illustration.

Remembering, for example, Botticelli's pretty interpretations, one would say off hand that Leonardo da Vinci was only slightly the man of his era.



Botticelli *Primavera* Uffizi Gallery, Florence  
 (Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office)

served the Church. Two years after his resolve and the burning of the nudes the artist stopped painting altogether, perhaps went into a monastery.

"The perfect painter," "the flawless artist," "the first universal man," "godlike," "incomparable"—these are phrases used in description of Leonardo da Vinci, the painter who in his own life and work epitomizes the Florentine intellectual search for beauty, who most effectively harmonizes science and art. He is not at all representative of the sumptuous side of Florentine activity. He designs pageant episodes and settings or ballroom decorations and richly jewelled costumes, but their spirit does not creep into his paintings, as it had into Uccello's and Pesellino's. The ornamentalism of Gozzoli and the poetized classicism of Botticelli alike pass him by.

Leonardo is the final product of the spirit of scientific research and intellectual refinement which comprises the sounder half of Medicean cultural revival. More than any other artist he set to work to perfect the painter's means of expression to find a formula for exact documentation with the brush. Where the efforts of Botticelli led to a dead end, Leonardo perfected a

method that profoundly affected the course of painting as an art. He completed Masaccio's task of achieving tonal and atmospheric realization. He led on to Fra Bartolommeo, Raphael, and Andrea del Sarto.

For one like the present writer who is not fully convinced of the universality and supremacy of Leonardo's genius as artist and yet is faced by the almost unanimous chorus of praise, it is well to take refuge in quotation in order to be sure of giving the man his due. A passage from Theophile Gautier indicates the extraordinary range of Leonardo's mind and his inventive production, and at the same time records the common view of his art<sup>1</sup>:

It was he who led the way to that pitch of perfection which has never since been surpassed. To be thus the leader and the unexcelled in art seems enough of glory; yet painting was but one of Leonardo's talents. So all-embracing was his genius, so endowed was he with every faculty, that he might have been equally great in any other domain of human effort.

Having created the one most beautiful of portraits, the one most beautiful picture, the one most beautiful fresco, the one most beautiful cartoon, he was content and gave his mind to other things—to the modelling of an immense horse, to the building of the Naviglio Canal, to the contriving of engines of war, to the invention of diving armour, flying machines, and other more or less chimerical imaginations. He suspected the usefulness of steam and predicted the balloon; he manufactured mechanical birds which flew and animals which walked. He made a lute, lyre fashioned in the shape of a horse's head, and played upon it exquisitely.

He invented the camera obscura. He planned the great works of engineering that have controlled the courses of the Arno and the Po. He walked beside the sea, and understood that the waters were composed of countless molecules.

No man was ever more human, more lovable, or more fascinating than this same Leonardo da Vinci. He was witty, graceful, polished. His bodily strength was so great that he could bend an iron horseshoe like lead. His physical beauty was flawless—the beauty of Apollo. Great painter, that he was, painting was but one among his splendid gifts.

Such is the orthodox view. By way of restoring the balance, one may suggest that it was the diffusion of Leonardo's energies and inventiveness over so many fields that prevented a surpassing success as painter. The very fact of his extraordinary intellectual powers, moreover, may have precluded exercise of any passionate creative faculty. It is said that he was the first to reconcile the real and the spiritual in art. But his approach was from what

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from the Master, an Art monograph dealing with Leonardo da Vinci, dated February 1901, published by Bates & Gould Company, Boston.



Leonardo da Vinci: *The Last Supper*. Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

But on second view it will appear that the courtly painters are representative only of a passing activity, painting a reflection of the life of an artificial, removed, class society; decorating an unstable and already doomed social circle. Deeper down even in the Medicean palaces and studios is this other serious concern with science, law, and psychology.

Leonardo's path wove in and out of the superficial pageantry of the palaces, but within himself he was devotedly and coldly concerned with knowledge and natural law. He dissected cadavers and calmly sketched the mangled victims of war and assassination. No one else so refined upon the methods of research and observation. No one ever believed more firmly that laws could be discovered under every phenomenon—even art.

That Leonardo came to the end of his life disillusioned and frustrated is perhaps an illustration of the eternal tragedy of the materialist in living, the realist in art. It is enough of fame for one man, no doubt, that for centuries he was recognized as owning the greatest intellect in history; that he foreshadowed a dozen generations of sceptics; that he turned man's eyes to nature, not the Church, for authority; that he incalculably advanced scientific research and invention.



Leonardo da Vinci *Mona Lisa* Louvre [*Archives Photographiques*]

By that token, which gives him warrant for the title "the perfect Florentine," he is excluded from the rolls of those in whose art the creative values transcend the illustrational ones. With him formal values are secondary. Mystic overtones are unknown. He is elegant, dignified, learned, and graceful. He also is literary, sentimental, academic. According as one's tastes are



for the formal and creative or for the realistic and intellectual, one will judge him the brainiest dilettante in the history of art, or the most perfect painter. He was a worldly success, the protégé and companion of princes and dukes, and he died, metaphorically if not literally, in the arms of a king. Even the kings had come to science.



*Rearing Horse. Bronze statuette, copy (unauthenticated) of Leonardo da Vinci's model for a monumental statue [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

## CHAPTER XVIII



Rome, the Neo-Pagan Popes, and Michelangelo

sacred art and a profane art, and the sacred art will not be less profane than the other

Get ye behind me, demons,' exclaimed the old master For in prophetic vision he saw the righteous and the saints assuming the appearance of melancholy athletes He saw Apollos playing the lute on a flowery hill in the midst of the Muses wearing light tunics He saw Auroras scattering roses, and a multitude of naked Dianas and Nymphs surprised on the banks of retired streams And the great Margaritone died, strangled by so horrible a presentiment of the Renaissance and the Bolognese School

If the Florentine *Quattrocento* had already witnessed a steady decline from the spiritual to the materialistic and worldly in art, it yet remained for the following century, and Rome, to fulfil the last implications of "Margaritone's vision" From the photographically inclined experimentation of Masaccio's *Adam and Eve*, through the reportorial limning of common people in Filippo Lippi's presumably religious pictures, to Botticelli's Florentine Venuses, the early Renaissance had swung a long course directly away from Byzantine impersonality and remote Franciscan innocence But it remained for sixteenth-century Rome to push immeasurably farther along the road of profane art

It was really a provincial, Correggio of Parma, who signalized the final triumph in capitalizing the lure of the flesh Could Margaritone have seen, just once, one of Correggio's sumptuous, voluptuous, melting nudes, it might well have proved to be that 'horrible presentiment of the Renaissance' which finally strangled the aged artist It would not have eased his mind that some of the most enjoyable of Correggio's undraped figures are shown as angels floating in the clouds of the Christian Heaven

This matter of "clothing the figures with dangerous appearances of flesh" is but one sign of arrival at the "high" Renaissance It is perhaps most typical because it intimates a whole train of consequences: luxuriousness, an officially endorsed paganism, drama, colour All these belong to the Roman half-century But also the passion for antiquity passes into a new phase Where Florentine academies and artists had played with classicism, it is now made into ruthless law The old monuments are restored measured, set up as the only worthy models *Æsthetics* becomes a scholars' plaything Intellectualism decides upon rules of creation

The artist now becomes fully dependent upon the wealthy patron. That bankers and merchants take over the Papacy is a circumstance immensely significant to Christian art A wealthy spendthrift Pope brings the foremost



Correggio *Leda and the Swan* State Museum, Berlin  
[Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

artists to Rome to decorate the Vatican Palace, to build pleasure pavilions in the Vatican gardens, to stage pageants and plays. The Popes themselves are foremost in advocating a Christianity wide enough to include the Roman ideals of pagan wisdom and worldly pleasures.

The encouraging thing about art, of course, is that in such a time, full of energy and enthusiasm, there will come an unpredictable artist who will ride above all the generalizations, all the laws, all the specifications laid down by patrons. Michelangelo was such a one. For him the long procession from abstract and spiritual symbolism to human and worldly representation meant only freedom to use the human body as he wished. By creative manipulation of it he travelled the other half of the circle, offering it to us in compositions made timeless by those mysterious formal elements which are not to be distinguished from the spiritual. He took what he needed out of the discoveries

incidental to the Revival of Learning, gaining classic monumentality without being bound by classic naturalism. As to the patrons, he fought a lifelong battle with them, and won at least to the extent of bequeathing to all later ages an uncontrolled revelation of his peculiar and unique vision.

Other artists, of course, better express the routine of the age. Raphael, the polite conformist, the perfect illustrator, the talented imitator, the fluent and over-perfect Andrea del Sarto, the competent but uninspired Bronzino. But it is Michelangelo who at once expresses and transcends the times, who picks up the impulse of the age and carries on to ageless achievement.

Rome was now heir to the worldly magnificence and show which had been characteristic of Florentine upper-class life in the fifteenth century. The Holy City drew away the artists by offering greater opportunity for display—and more money. Against the background of the most flagrant moral degeneracy in the long and spotty history of the Papacy, and within the flow of violent, corrupt, and unhealthy life in the secularized "religious" courts, this unhappy fact about art stands out: the painter or sculptor or architect could be bought, and set to work to decorate the surroundings of ruffian-rulers and capitalist-cardinals. Celebrated artists are considered part of the pomp and swagger of a court.

Farther in the background is the struggle between the Church and secular emperors and princes for the power to rule over Europe. The actual churchmen had already lost, as they were certain to do when they sought to dominate men's loyalty by closing their minds, in a time when freedom of thought and intellectual research were becoming major human objectives, this opening quarter of the sixteenth century is the very time of the free-thinking Luther in the North, and the beginning of the Protestant rift.

They had lost too by giving way to personal ambitions, to the lust for worldly power, and to personal licentiousness. The churchmen had thus failed to establish a kingdom of God in Europe, because of blindness, bigotry, and moral weakness. But the Church framework had proven too valuable to be scrapped. What happened was that secular and commercial princes annexed the Papacy. There will even be Medici popes.

Whether this in a sense "saved" the Roman Church, or further debauched and discredited it, thus resulting in the great schism of the Reformation, is beside the point here. What signifies for art is that Leo X caps the process of political-religious change by which Rome becomes the centre of Renaissance

worldly energy and spending. The Vatican is made the greatest palace in Italy. The trappings of the richest courts are brought into the very Church itself. If pagan subject-matter and the antique spirit are the fashionable things in secular art, the Vatican too must have representations of Parnassus and Athens on its sacred walls. St. Peter's must be rebuilt on palatially magnificent lines.

The impulse to decorate the church opulently and to provide a luxurious palace for the chief representative of God on earth was by no means a new one. Since the age of Constantine, when the Eastern Christian establishment had taken on the habiliments of imperial Rome, a measure of sumptuous decoration had been deemed fitting. Already in the fifteenth century cardinals had vied with petty princes and banker-overlords in ornamenting their palaces with works of art. The earlier popes had brought painters to Rome. Masaccio had died there while executing a commission, and Piero della Francesca and Fra Angelico had been among those bidden to add to the glory of the older Vatican buildings. Pinturicchio had been called by the Borgia Pope, Pius II, to decorate his apartments.

Under Alexander VI, Pinturicchio, joined by his teacher, Perugino, had painted frescoes in several Roman churches, and they were joined by Botticelli and Ghirlandaio in decorating the Sistine Chapel. But it is Julius II, the della Rovere Pope, who will bring this tendency to its climax, who will set Michelangelo and Raphael to their tasks in Rome, who will plan the new St. Peter's, which remains to this day the world's foremost example of a church adorned in the *nouveau-riche* palatial spirit.

"Raphael, the most beloved name in art"—so Berenson sums up, not wholly approvingly, the nineteenth-century idolization of the greatest of all Christian illustrators. Of Raphael's Madonnas, Lubke says: "They exist for all time and for all mankind because they present an immortal truth in a form that makes a universal appeal." Lubke believes that Raphael's *Sistine Madonna* "is, and will continue to be, the apex of all religious art."

But today the air of sanctity and homage built up around the *Sistine Madonna*, in that hushed chapel-like room in a Dresden gallery where it is enshrined apart from all other works of art, is beginning to be clouded by doubts if not actually disturbed by smiles. To many visitors the picture, despite its obvious surface merits, is most significant as a memento of the sentimentalism and superficiality of appreciation in a long period of academic-

realistic obsession from 1600 to 1900 How many observers in the new century have recalled uneasily those eye-rolling, wooden cherubs!

Raphael Sanzio is the illustrator-painter *par excellence* He simplifies, makes obvious, prettifies He deals largely in children and pretty young women, though he can sketch a characterful portrait on occasion He dramatizes his subjects subtly and unobtrusively His exactitude of drawing is sufficient to satisfy the most narrowly trained realist No one before had so wonderfully portrayed the texture of velvet, of brocades, of a caressable skin It is all virginally done, however, with none of the sensuous relish and glow that Giorgione and Titian will introduce, in Venice, during the same half-century

Raphael's whole technique, indeed seems to match some feminine reticence, the sentimental temperament, within himself It is, like his attitude toward life, sweet, smoothed calculated not to challenge or disturb anyone His composition is facile, shallowly effective, balanced As the subject-matter is easy to understand, so the pictorial composition is always attractive, delectably rhythmic, at first glance

This was, as we know, just the dish for the Victorians—Latin, British, German, and American alike No one ever had such a popular vogue as Raphael And that is greatly unfortunate and a little unfair to the artist It is probable that he knew he was no creator in the Michelangelesque sense He had started in his native Umbria as a pupil of Perugino, and soon was out-doing that near master at his own game of realistic religious picturing He early painted faces not to be distinguished from those by his teacher But he picked up from Fra Bartolommeo a trick of figure-grouping and from Leonardo the trick of pyramidal surface composition. (Very beautifully he used it too)

All these influences, as also that of the antique Roman statues just then creating such a furore, he assimilated to his own facile style Later when he saw Michelangelo becoming his one rival in popularity, favoured over him for an unaccountable vigour, grandeur, and formal aliveness he was misled for a moment and attempted to incorporate that giant's virtues also into his own—and utterly failed He remains the great Renaissance eclectic, able to imitate or absorb all the fashionable, effective traits developed by his predecessors up to the capacity of his own great talent and feminine understanding failing only when he entered the ground of the one real genius among his contemporaries The feminine charm and sentimental thoughtfulness of his work remain his claim to attention



*Raphael Madonna of the Chair Pitti Gallery Florence  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]*

Born in 1483 in Urbino, of a father who was both minor painter and minor poet Raphael was precocious, and already successful at an age when he might well have been doing an apprentice's work. It was Perugino who introduced him into the cultural centre at Florence, and here he picked up those other influences, out of the innovations of Leonardo and Fra Bartolommeo which flowed so easily into his "manner." By 1508, when he was twenty-five years old, he was invited by Pope Julius II to go to Rome to decorate some apartments in the Vatican. He so pleased his patron with his preliminary figures



gone out of fashion, and the obviously posed figures are accounted wooden. Nevertheless, Fra Bartolommeo's method of figure-grouping was often effective, and he gave this (as well as Leonardo's pyramidal composition) to Raphael. More lastingly popular is Andrea del Sarto, known in his own time as "the perfect painter," and still notable as one of the great technicians among Italian painter-illustrators. Better than any biography of him is Browning's poem *Andrea del Sarto*, wherein the determining weakness of the man and the fatal facility of the artist are illuminatingly set forth, in a monologue addressed by the painter to his beloved but unfaithful wife. He is a Raphael betrayed by a commonplace mind and given to even more disagreeably candy-like colouring.

At this time—and therefore sandwiched in here between the two great figures of the era, Raphael and Michelangelo—there were still other thoroughly competent but not greatly inspired artists. Bronzino did attractive portraits, although he showed mediocre imagination and invention whenever he essayed the sort of monumental story-picture produced by Raphael and Fra Bartolommeo and even by Andrea del Sarto. Pontormo too is more successful as a portraitist. All of these minor painters were Florentines.

Rome, indeed, had no school of art except as the patrons there drew in artists by the prodigality of their pay. The spirit of the age was Roman, and the major works in architecture and painting were accomplished there, but Florence still bred or attracted artists and remained a creative centre until the mid-sixteenth century, although the star of Venice was already rising. At Parma, Correggio was practising his own profuse variation of "the grand style," but he became involved in glorification of the human body as a sensuously lovely object. His pagan allegories and Jovian love-incidents are among the most engaging things in all erotically inspired art. His murals, denying architectural control, were a bad influence on his followers, and had something to do with the descent into baroque. But because he sums up one line of Renaissance development, intimating a major change in the direction of European art, and affording a pleasure particular to his own achievement, it is worth while to quote Symonds's pithy description of him:

Correggio created a world of beautiful human beings, the whole condition of whose existence is an innocent and radiant wantonness. Over the domain of tragedy he held no sway, nor could he deal with subjects demanding pregnancy of intellectual meaning. He paints the three Fates, for instance, like young and joyous Bacchantes. It is enough for him to produce a gleeful symphony by the



Michelangelo *The Temptation and The Expulsion* Sistine Chapel, Rome  
 [Andersen photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

play of light and colour, by the animation of his figures and by the intoxicating beauty of his forms. His angels are genius disimprisoned from the chalices of flowers, hours of an erotic Paradise, elemental sprites of nature wantoning in Eden in her prime.

In coming to Michelangelo one meets the first genius in painting since Giotto. Despite the extraordinary advance in the art, and the long procession of notable figures from Masaccio and Fra Angelico to Leonardo and Raphael, they are minor men as compared with this unaccountable creative genius. Taking up painting only under protest, insisting that he wanted only to practise his own art of sculpture, he yet outdid all his contemporaries in originality, vitality, and sheer compelling mastery in the mural art. A single figure by Michelangelo seems to today's moderns to have more plastic vigour than all that Raphael ever created. Those other men of this chapter are all pygmies beside him.

For one thing while every body else was busy introducing Greek harmony and grace and idealization and prettifying painting, here was an imagination that remembered that Christianity had a Hebrew-Biblical as well as a pagan inheritance, who could thunder like Jeremiah and praise mightily like the Psalmists, and be profoundly troubled by immediate life. In his re-creation of the Greeks too he saw through the current sentimentalization and weak-

ening of the classic heritage. The romantic sweetness of Raphael and the ecstatic eroticism of Correggio fade from memory when one meets Michelangelo's Greek Sibyls.

One may well ask which among the sixteenth-century artists is the truer symbol and voice of the age. The cultured circles had found refuge in the Revival of Learning, and in visual arts that put on the face of a romanticized classicism. For more than a century the patrons, establishing academies and financing the uncovering of ancient monuments and the publication of treatises about them, had encouraged this second-hand, reflective picturing. It progressed not without a new scientific acumen and a freshly reasoned understanding of optical law and the structure of natural forms. But the classical was a refuge from all the larger realities of Italian life in that time. In the midst of murder, violence, and the shocks of war and overturned states, the current of "harmonizing" art flowed on.

Leonardo brought to a final expression the intellectualized attitude. Botticelli epitomized the pageant-like neo-pagan unrealities of the courtly classicism. Raphael equally avoided any but pleasing reality, while capping the procession toward photographic statement. These painters expressed the spirit of the pedagogues and the aspirations of the rich patron-princes of their time. They were busy shaping a new Greece in a wish-formed likeness of the old. But may it not be that Michelangelo, thinking on Dante and Savonarola as well as Plato and the Muses, giving up sweetened harmony and obvious charm for a passionate outpouring of emotion and a half-tamed cry of defiance—may not he be the truest expression of that turbulent sixteenth century?

Personally, Leonardo and Raphael had been cultured, graceful, not a little feminine, true courtiers, every inch. Michelangelo was rough in manner, troubled in mind, sharp-spoken. But his was no cramped, mean outlook. If his faculties refused to discount the miseries of the world and the immediate troubles of living, they nonetheless embraced a great passion for the joys of work and the wonders of human aspiration. There is joyousness incarnate in the figures of the Sistine vault. The zest of living and grandeur of human endeavour have never else been recorded with such relish—and such galvanizing effect. As he has synthesized the Biblical and the Greek elements in Christianity, so he has brought into one expression the world's woe and its joy, human tribulation and human glory. If Michelangelo lived in tempestuous pain—and he records often that he did—he knew the other face of that



Michelangelo: *The Drunkenness of Noah* Sistine Chapel, Rome  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

experience, he emerged into a rapture and contemplation beyond the capacity of any of his neo-Greek contemporaries. In his own right he was philosopher, prophet, creator.

Michelangelo was born in 1475, in the mountains above Florence, of middle-class parentage. He early decided for himself that he would be an artist; against the wishes of his father, who, however, came to see the light when, in 1489, the lad's talent attracted the attention of the reigning Medici overlord in Florence, and thus secured patronage for both himself and the family. In the Medici gardens he studied antique statues at first hand, and he was taken into the house of Lorenzo, where he met artists and scholars, poets and professional antiquarians. It was at the time of Savonarola's fiery denunciation of worldly luxury and art, and the lad seems to have absorbed the evangelical influence with the courtly. He was himself silent, sensitive, and moody, and never came to proficiency in the politeness of the drawing-room. When Lorenzo de' Medici died, and his son was driven from Florence, the young artist's exposure to the influences that shaped so many of his contemporaries was over. In 1496, at the age of twenty-one, he went to Rome.

"Here," writes Symonds, "while the Borgias were turning the Vatican into a den of thieves and harlots, he executed the purest of all his statues—a *Pietà* in marble."

It was thus that his first masterpiece was born, after perhaps a half-dozen trial statues. For many years thereafter he was destined to live in Rome, a paradoxically Christian temperament among pseudo-Greeks, a reserved, introspective contemplator of the historical comi-tragedy of man, among all the bright intelligences and the eager limners of the papal entourage.

Michelangelo stood his ground with popes and princes, pitting his dignity against their inperiousness, his solitary assurance against their whims. And yet it was a pope, Julius II, who overbore him in the matter of the decorations of the Sistine Chapel, forced him to take the commission for painting the ceiling vault, when what the artist solely wished was to be left to practise in peace the sculpture which he knew to be pre-eminently his art.

As Michelangelo was a superman, self-disciplined to the point of austere asceticism in an age of indulgence, passionately mystic when everyone around him was trying to be bright and rational and open, so the figures he painted in the Vatican chapel are superhuman. The obvious largeness of aspect is matched by sublimity of conception and character. And—rarest of phenomena—the sheer plastic vitality of the paintings is similarly vast, inescapable.

Other artists had painted the side walls of the chapel. It was in 1508 that Pope Julius II decided that the ceiling too should be done and that Michelangelo was the man to paint it. At best the task would have seemed a thankless one, even to a practised muralist. The vault is nearly 100 feet above the floor, a curving surface, a half-cylinder in shape, 133 feet long. For this Michelangelo, gently setting aside the Pope's suggested scheme, devised a series of pictures and figures and architectural accessories which constitutes the greatest single exhibit of the painter's art in Europe.

The conception is as audacious in the vast range of its subject-matter as in its organization. Not only the creation and history of man, in the Christian interpretation, are shown, but the ancient prophets, Greek as well as Hebrew, who foretold Christ's world, and a host of supporting personages from legend and imagination. No observer could then or can today take in the full significance of the total work. Certain scenes set off separately, may be studied as single pictorial entities, such as the famous *Creation of Man* and *The Deluge*, or the colossal figures of the *Sibyls* and *Prophets*. But the amazing thing is the sense of vigour and grandeur that runs through major and minor



Michelangelo *The Creation of Adam* Sistine Chapel, Rome  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

parts of the composition. There are 343 figures in the ceiling. After trying out assistants, Michelangelo painted the entire 10 000 square feet of surface himself. In a famous sonnet of his he complains of the discomfort he experienced in painting while lying on his back on the scaffolding.

It took him four and one-half years to complete the job. After the scaffolding was down and the work greatly admired, the Pope suggested that the artist enrich the composition with additions in bright colours and gold, to which Michelangelo replied that the prophets and the holy men pictured there were rich not by reason of that sort of wealth. Nor has the world since doubted that here a painter created the richness that is without measure, beyond gold.

That Michelangelo as painter gained from the studies of Michelangelo the sculptor is not to be doubted. No other painter has accomplished figures so swelling with power, so statuesquely monumental. But the means he uses are those legitimate to painting art. On the two-dimensional plane he creates the space-volume impression by line, chiaroscuro, colour, texture. Greater plastic mastery is not to be found in the whole range of painting. Powerful, rhythmic, profoundly animated is the impression. Each figure is living, abounding with life, and the throng of figures is gorgeously orchestrated, symphonically related. Never else has the human body been so sublimely utilized, so woven into poems epic and heroic.

It was twenty-one years after the completion of the Sistine ceiling a period during which the artist did no painting, that Michelangelo was called by another Pope, Paul III, to paint an immense mural for the rear wall of the chapel, above the altar. For seven years more he laboured, and then in 1541 *The Last Judgment* was unveiled and a masterpiece of extraordinary vigour and originality was given to the world.

Again Michelangelo made his own rules. He had learned all that the Renaissance perfecting of the picturing medium made possible by way of clarity of statement and truth to light-and-shade appearance. But—stirred perhaps by the degradation and corruption of life around him, by the tragic decline of Italy and the crumbling of human character—he fixed a conception of the Final Judgment of man which is medieval in its uncompromising rectitude and sombreness. It is no pretty picture, and perhaps too violently animated for architectural ‘decoration’. But it is surpassingly moving, plastically alive as a whole and in every part, and its allegory, its picturing of the divine judgment scene, stuns the mind. As the Chinese say, it has its own movement of life. As the Europeans say, it instructs and makes men better.

Unlike the ceiling decorations *The Last Judgment* is laid out as one picture, but the surface is so vast—forty-three by fifty-four feet—and the troops of figures so crowded that ordinarily appreciation is directed to this or that part. One who has become adept at creating his own frames, picking an arbitrary section of the whole and mentally isolating it for study and enjoyment, will find a score of profoundly stirring pictures (some of them subtly marked off by Michelangelo himself though without disturbance of the total effectiveness).

Even in photographs one cannot fail to realize the power, the imaginativeness and the superb draughtsmanship of these detached fragments. Unfortunately the smoke and dust of four hundred years have almost obliterated the colour. There has been also some damaging ‘restoration’ attempted at times. It is said, moreover, that at the unveiling certain figures appeared too naked for the sensibilities of the Vatican ecclesiastics, and clothes were added by a minor artist who was known ever after as ‘the breeches maker’. Michelangelo himself was so incensed by the remarks of one of the prudish courtiers, a certain Biagio da Cesena, that he painted the man’s portrait into the group of sinners in Hell.

Michelangelo the painter is known almost exclusively by the two works in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican. He apparently had no interest in easel-



Michelangelo *The Last Judgment* Detail Sistine Chapel Rome  
[Anderson photo courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

pictures In the only one that survives complete, the early *Holy Family* now in the Uffizi Gallery he proves that he can pack into the smaller space a generous measure of that power so evident in his murals and his sculptures The rhythms are strong and vital, and the drawing masterly There is, however, concession to the fashion of sweet finish, which is not known in the more monumental works Two or three unfinished pictures, with great





Michelangelo *The Holy Family* Uffizi Gallery, Florence  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

virtues so far as they go, but still incomplete, are the only other paintings credited to him. There is, however, a portrait of the artist so fine, so rugged, and yet so sensitive, that it is difficult to avoid the inference that Michelangelo at least helped to paint it if he did not completely do so.

One of the main lines of Renaissance progress in art had been scientific, and one of the sciences perfected in this era was anatomy. Giotto had attempted no revelation of the human body beneath the voluminous garments of his figures. But Ghiberti and Donatello were already accomplished re-

dealers of bone and muscle, and Masaccio individualized the anatomy of his nudes. Leonardo pursued the unusual aspects of the body, even to sketching the peculiar hunching and muscular sag of a corpse recently hanged. Thus was science in art pushed to an ultimate point.

But Michelangelo, evidently knowing anatomy to the last physical detail, went on to that other half of the study of the human figure, learning as never did any one else to fix the expressiveness of attitudes and movements. He used the body as an unsurpassed medium for the communication of emotion. Passion and heroism, despair and transfiguration, contemplation and exaltation, all are expressed by this one bodily means. It is said that toward the end of his life the beauty of the human form so obsessed him that he brooded continually over the ways in which the great truths of the life and aspiration (and tragedy) of mankind might be interpreted through it.

The little extras that Ghiberti and Donatello and the della Robbias had put into their sculptures—borrowing the perspective vistas of the theatre designers and the landscapes of the painters to add variety to their reliefs—were here forgotten like toys gone out of fashion. In sculpture as in painting, the body is Michelangelo's supreme material, the body set out free of all encumbering circumstance, the body alone speaking for the dignity and sorrows and triumphs of the human soul.

Where the eloquence of the body leaves off and pure sculptural eloquence begins, no one can say. Of the abstract values of the art on its own account—if it could be freed from subject-matter—Michelangelo proved himself a master not only unrivalled in his age but unsurpassed by any artist in the whole history of Europe. Only the anonymous creators of the Parthenon figures had grasped so much of mountainous strength and exalted vigour. The sheer plastic vitality of his single figures is enormous. There is in them a hint of cosmic order and elemental power.

With that early work, the *Pietà*, done at twenty-four, so much more graceful and harmoniously rhythmic than his later things, there is already also an amplitude, a power, that heralds the arrival of a sculptural genius. Immediately the art is lifted out of the field of reproductive activity, of naturalism and sentimentality, to which the later sculptors of the *Quattrocento* had degraded it. In the *Pietà* one does not have to look at the expression on Mary's face to feel the sentiment of the incident, and one does not remark the truth of the modelling or the marvellous exactitude of treatment of this or that part. The whole thing breathes the sentiment—the largeness of the enfolding feminine



*Portrait of Michelangelo* Possibly a self-portrait Uffizi Gallery, Florence  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

figure, the play and counterplay of mass and direction, the ample, sheltering completeness.

Thus largeness of conception, this powerful movement, is instinct throughout his sculpture. A few pieces sacrifice a little of it to more realistic statement of the observed figure and attitude, particularly the famous *David*, which may be considered little more than a trial piece. But almost always there is

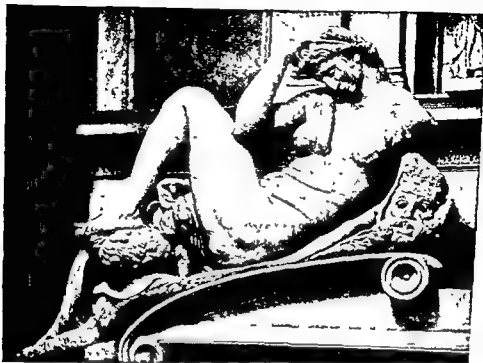


*Michelangelo Day Stone Medici Chapel, San Lorenzo Church, Florence  
[Anderson phot., courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]*

preserved the sense of the life of the stone block, the push of elemental rock-bound energies, the poise of vast forces held in tension

If, as some modern critics believe every sculptural composition is an organization of volumes in space, with relation to an indicated field or frame, Michelangelo is the supreme Western master, both in indication of the frame and in bold manipulation of the contained volumes for plastic vigour with repose. In the massive, voluminous amplex of his works he rivals those world-masters, the Egyptians and the Chinese.

Most of Michelangelo's statues are left to posterity as single figures, although planned originally as parts of great tomb compositions which never took more than fragmentary form. Long and bitter were the quarrels the artist waged with his patrons over these commissioned projects, and grievous the loss of his time in balked effort. But even unfinished, with only seven of the score of planned figures in place, the mausoleum room of the Medici



Michelangelo: *Night*. Stone. Medici Chapel, San Lorenzo Church, Florence  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

family in San Lorenzo Church in Florence takes rank as a major shrine of the sculptural art in Europe. The four figures known as *Day*, *Night*, *Dawn*, and *Evening* are huge tomb guardians with an extraordinary appearance of confined movement. Here nudity lends itself to dignity and grandeur, and each single body is made to breathe the feeling of majestic power. They are not natural—Heaven forbid! Rather they are superhuman conceptions, dramatized and superbly “artificial.”

There are other celebrated works: the *Moses* in Rome; two slaves breaking their bonds, planned for a grand tomb in St. Peter's, upon which the *Moses*, too, was to have been an item; a relief plaque of the *Madonna and Child*; and a bust known as the *Brutus*.

Michelangelo lived to be eighty-nine years old. In the end art itself failed to satisfy his longing to serve mankind. Having lived the most blameless of lives, as mortal standards go, he yet further denied worldly interests and gave



*Michelangelo Madonna and Child Medici Chapel, San Lorenzo Church, Florence*  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

his mind to God. His last statue was a *Deposition from the Cross* made for the cathedral in Florence. It pleased him to portray himself as Joseph of Arimathea, sorrowfully handing down Jesus's body to the Virgin Mother and the Magdalen below. The dejected yet dignified and loving figure was symbolic of what the world was to mean to him in the decade before his death in 1564.

Sixteenth-century sculpture, outside the product of this one genius, is weak if not trivial. If only for his unique character one artist cannot, however, be overlooked, although his statues are hardly more than the elegant trifles of a

*pasticheur* in bronze Benvenuto Cellini is one of the most engaging braggart in art history His autobiography throws light on the violent and corrupt life of the times in a way that is enormously interesting and valuable. But his boasting about his work is not justified by the evidence of the bronze statuettes, bric-a-brac, and salt-cellars credited to him His one major statue, the *Perseus with the Head of Medusa*, in Florence, is an unsculptural picture-piece an enlarged version of a goldsmith's conception of the new "natural" art of sculpture It stands on a base almost incredibly over-adorned with this and that Nevertheless, when the statue was set up, sonnets and odes to Cellini were tacked on pillars around the square, and he has been accounted a leading European sculptor by all the ornament-enamoured generations that have intervened

Some of Cellini's bronze statuettes are pretty mantelpiece ornaments within the current idiom, and the workmanship is marvellous for its delicacy But increasingly the art student turns to him not for his art but to enjoy the unique and racy chronicle of the life of an artist-craftsman, who puts down his exploits as murderer and seducer as illuminatingly as those in the field of goldsmithing, and sets the whole against a background in which currents of dark medieval credulity mingle with the new scientific elements in the common mind

At this time there came into European sculpture that strange mixture of truth to observation and unimaginative academic manner which was to stultify the art for nearly four hundred years Every sort of unsculptural, spiky, and dispersed effect is tried, until one has to believe that the sense of a proper relationship between subject and medium was wholly lost The realism of Cellini's contemporaries and followers is unexciting The artist known variously as Giambologna, Giovanni da Bologna, and Jean de Boulogne, a Frenchman identified with the school of Florence, is outstanding among the makers of bronze statuettes. Replicas of his *Flying Mercury* used to be in every home

There was at this time a Paduan school of sculpture which was especially prolific of small bronze groups The Paduans followed the most theatrical aspects of Florentine fashion, but occasionally turned out a less involved statuette with spontaneous charm and unmistakable grace Andrea Riccio and Francesco da Sant' Agata are most significant. At Venice, near Padua, Jacopo Sansovino was both popular sculptor and leading architect His statues are strictly in the fashion One of his followers, Alessandro Vittoria,



*St Sebastian* By an unknown Italian sculptor Terra cotta  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

designed, by way of exception a *Negress with a Mirror* which adds a certain sculptural synthesis and stylistic suaveness to the naturalistic values. Exceptional too is the larger rhythmic grace of a *St Sebastian*, now in the Metropolitan Museum New York, by an unnamed sculptor.

The truth is that in Europe from 1550 to 1900 there is precious little sculpture that transcends the limitations of a diverting naturalism. The celebrated frogs and crabs from Padua are emblematic.





Alessandro Vittoria *Negress with a Mirror* Bronze  
 [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

Michelangelo called to architecture as he had been to painting against his own desires and judgment, acquitted himself worthily in one monument, St. Peter's dome—and, for the rest joined the routine Renaissance architects in rearranging the decorative remnants derived from a misunderstood classicism. The academies and the architect-scholars had declared for a complete return to antique virtues, and henceforth all monumental Italian building was to wear the semblance of ancient Rome. The rebuilders of the sixteenth-century Holy City could visualize its aggrandizement only in terms of the capital of the Caesars.

Bramante was the architect most responsible for fixing the stamp of old Rome indelibly on the products of the new "Roman school." He had been a successful practitioner in Milan when Pope Julius II called him to Rome to plan a St Peter's Church intended to be a worthily magnificent capitol of Christendom. In some minor works Bramante showed his taste by adopting the less ornamental and more constructional features of ancient architecture, preferring the Doric order to the Corinthian. His plan for St Peter's was the sort of compromise one would expect when an eclectic is faced with a new vast problem to be solved in the idioms of a long-buried past. His death intervened between the time of the clearing of the site and the building of the church. His plans were so altered by his successors that he is to be little blamed for the botched aspect of the present building.

St Peter's is so typical of a certain indeterminateness or inadequacy of Renaissance architecture that it is well to give it greater attention than its merits as a work of art strictly warrant. Renaissance architecture is, in the sum, the collection of ways in which builders enamoured of classic ornamentation spread the borrowed decorative elements over their structures. In St Peter's all the façades are inadequate, and in general dull. The interior, on the other hand, is brilliantly alive and vigorously ostentatious.

After Bramante, Raphael had been called to supervise the structure, and with him Antonio da Sangallo, and they may or may not have improved the original plan. Finally Michelangelo was forced to take over the work. Vasari says "There were various opinions but His Holiness, inspired, as I believe, by God, resolved to entrust the building to Michelangelo." The Pope commanded him to accept, and he was obliged to take part in the work against his will."

It is not necessary to review in detail the changes Michelangelo made, mostly by way of simplification. There are rear wall-sections as he designed them, although a baroque upper story was added later to negate their simple dignity and largeness. In any case the dome is the one addition worthy of the great artist's genius at the same time the one feature of the immense structure which adds to the world's store of architectural masterpieces. To this day it is a joy to the eye on the Roman skyline. And it has been the model for countless crowning domes on churches, libraries, and state-houses throughout Europe and the Americas. In silhouette it is sensitive yet powerful.

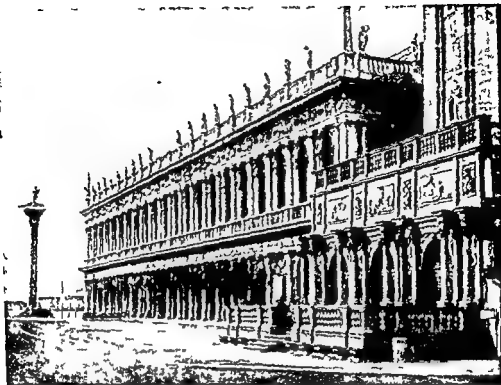
While St Peter's Church is the show piece of Renaissance architecture, and supremely important by reason of Michelangelo's crowning feature, there



Dome of St. Peter's Church Rome [Photo courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

are lesser monuments which are more consistent examples of stylization that is of consistent adaptation of the ancient motives to façades. The Farnese Palace in Rome by Sangallo is one of the purest adaptations with its symmetrical rows of pedimented windows and its huge cornice. It is as academic, studied and unspontaneous as any scholar could wish. Incidentally a great deal of the usefulness of the building was sacrificed for the antique effect. There are other examples ranging from the rather severe Palazzo Massimo to the overburdened rear façade of the Villa Medici with a triumphal arch as central motive and a collection of actual relics of the ancients embedded in the surrounding panelled walls. These are accounted masterpieces in many of the scholarly books.

But the more attractive buildings of the late Renaissance were to find homes in the Northern cities particularly Vicenza and Venice. Vignola, to be sure did some notable monuments in the neighbourhood of Rome particularly the Farnese Palace at Caprarola which has an interior court perfectly typical



Sansovino Library and Loggetta, Piazza San Marco, Venice

of heavy Roman re-creation, and at Florence there are musty academic façades by Vasari, the painter-architect-writer whose histories of art are usefully quoted by all later generations. But at Vicenza, Palladio brought a new refinement to the manner of rearranging columns, pilasters, arches, and pediments. He came nearer than any other to being a creator while using the antiquarian language which the custom of the time ordained. There is a certain magnificence in the Municipal Palace of Vicenza, and an unaccustomed dignity without heaviness in the Villa Rotunda. It was from Palladio that Inigo Jones chiefly took his Renaissance variation into England, and therefore Palladio who was ancestor to the American "colonial" style.

At Venice, Sansovino succeeded in giving a lighter touch to adapted forms, particularly in the Loggetta at the foot of the campanile. In the library near by he gained a more heavily decorative effect with two superimposed colonnades and a generous measure of garlands, statues, and other incidental

ornamentation In both these buildings—both recognizable as Renaissance work at its best—there is a traceable source in antiquity for every structural and ornamental feature They sum up, as it were, the slight inventiveness and the great learning of the Italian architects They point up the way in which Renaissance architecture, even while being made gracefully rhythmic, departed from the functional law of the art The latest view is that all the grace in the world and all the learning from celebrated past periods, could not redeem buildings that were actually one thing but *seemed* to be another Engineering truth is here disguised, or worse, is distorted to fit within “paper” façades

One would not be obliged to analyse the phase at such length if it had not been this mode of building that prevailed for three more centuries Even today architectural students are commonly taught how to design columns and mouldings and pedimented doorways out of books written and illustrated by Vignola and Palladio We begin to suspect that it is one of the most gigantic frauds ever perpetrated within the practice of a major art

In Sansovino's Venice at this time there was in another art, originality of an extraordinary sort along with splendour and authentic opulence Painting, which had all but died in Rome with the completion of *The Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel, had been brought to a glorious pitch unknown before Within a century the city of the canals saw three of the greatest geniuses of Western art Giorgione Titian, and Tintoretto What happens later in Rome is hardly more than a pendant to their story

## Venetian Painting Orientalized Italy

IT is told of one of the earliest Venetian painters, Gentile Bellini, that he was invited to take up residence at the court of the Sultan Mohammed II at Constantinople. Having greatly pleased the monarch by the skill and perfection of some portraits, he was commissioned to paint also a series of religious pictures in the Western manner. A *Beheading of St John* seemed particularly praiseworthy to the Sultan, who, however, criticized what seemed to him a slight anatomical inaccuracy. The neck of John, he thought, would not look exactly that way if a head had just been severed from it. The artist demurring, his kind patron summoned a slave whom he had an attendant behead on the spot, thus being enabled to justify his opinion. From that day, it is said, Bellini lost his taste for court life and longed only to return to Venice. Having made, as soon as possible, a plausible excuse, he was released back to his own city, loaded down by the appreciative Sultan with honours, recommendations, and gifts.

Bellini is a symbol: he stands for a conjuncture of forces, a meeting of influences, destined to shape Venetian painting. Inheritor of the Italian traditional technique and manner—his father, Jacopo Bellini, had been an assistant of Gentile da Fabriano and had travelled in Florence and Rome, and Mantegna was his brother-in-law—inheritor thus of a Western way of art, he yet had the East in his blood through the Oriental nature of the Venetian-Byzantine environment, and through actual contacts like that at the court of Constantinople. The incident is a reminder, too, of the violence which artists had to witness, as a shaping circumstance of that age.

The background out of which emerged Giorgione, Titian, and Tintoretto, thus was half-Italian, half-Eastern. The atmospheric glow of the Orient had taken Venice for its own—St Mark's is no less colourful and

melting than are the mosques of Baghdad and Cairo and Samarkand—but Venice was, too, a part of Italy, where the Revival of Learning had turned the direction of the Renaissance art current back to ancient Greece and Rome.

The Sienese painters who had so notably exploited the legacy of colour and sumptuous design from Byzantium had now disappeared. Of the two ways of art in the world, Florence and Rome had fully established the classic or Western way, rational, realistic, and intellectual, as the European norm and had rejected the way of the Orient, emotional, sensualized, and formalized. After Michelangelo, Florentine painting is thin, natural (except for its artificial hard colouring), no more than agreeable, but there is yet one meeting place of East and West. In Venice the two ways are definitely brought together.

In Venice there had already been a long-established tradition of luxurious living and splendid pageantry, and a wealth of public art. The most celebrated trading centre in Europe, rich with the imports from both East and West, the city was stored with the spoils of countless collecting expeditions. There had even been laws forcing every returning ship to bring some object for the adornment of public buildings or piazzas.

Free from civil strife and seldom embroiled in foreign wars, the community was ruled as a nominal republic by a group of commercial barons. They had vied with each other in building and furnishing sumptuous palaces, and in contributing funds for the decoration of the churches, guild-halls and community palace. For a long time architects and artists were imported, as had been, long centuries before, the builders and mosaicists of St Mark's. But it was time for the flowering of a local school.

The routine of life, too, was shot through with colourful elements. The calendar had an extraordinary number of holidays, and carnivals and processions and ceremonial meetings were continually before the eye. Here the first great opera houses were built. There was drama in the air. Life itself was a *festa*. In the setting of the city, moreover, there was glamorous glow, opalescent colour. Who shall say whether it is the marble and fresco and gilt of the buildings lining the canals or the soft sunlight on the water that is the cause of the golden haze that lies over Venice? Symonds speaks of "that melodrama of flame and gold and rose and orange and azure which the skies and lagoons of Venice yield almost daily to the eyes."

These so to speak local and geographical influences could not alone create



Titian *Bacchus and Ariadne* [Courtesy National Gallery, London]

a consummate art. From the other direction, from the Italy that is more of the West, drained the impetus to a free sort of painting. If the culture of Venice escaped the blighting effect of the return to classicism, nevertheless it gained immensely by those other major Renaissance changes: the emancipation of the mind for free thought and experiment, and the push forward into an exuberance of expression. The neo-classic incubus evaded, this one city profited enormously by the spirit of liberalism which had grown so notably in the Florence of the early *Quattrocento*. But here, late in that century, and



during the sixteenth, there was no knuckling under when scholars set up Athens and Rome as the only orthodox models. The approach did not become academic and literary—as with Botticelli, Raphael, and Andrea del Sarto. There was no fealty sworn to science—that science which had so absorbed Leonardo that he departed from painting except as a sideline. Nor was there, in Venice, even a nominal obligation to the Church; the Venetian merchant princes were content to remain merchant princes, not annexing the titles of cardinal and pope.

In other words here was a market for painting that was rich in technique and devoted to a subject-matter in keeping with the atmosphere of carnival and luxury and drama. Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese answered the demand of the merchant princes. They were indeed of their time and spirit, and they pushed the painting art to new achievements of gorgeous expression.

Colour is the typical, the salient resource that is freshly capitalized and made to serve in unprecedented ways. No longer a mere addition to the painting, or a means of harmonizing, it becomes a leading element in the plastic orchestration. But it is to be noted too—having been overlooked in a great many critical estimates—that in the matter of composition in space, of formal organization, the Venetians push far ahead of the Florentines. After the Sienese decorative formalism died out, the school of Florence progressively lost the abstract values of structure and the plastic richness of the early expression, dispersing the formal synthesis under the new concern for anatomical truth, light-and-shade reality, scientific perspective, and general “naturalism.” Florentine composition may be expert in the mechanical surface aspect, but it is increasingly lacking in the deeper three-dimensional, self-contained power of movement. Raphael already is plastically weak. With Andrea del Sarto and Guido Reni the abstract and contrapuntal values have disappeared.

The school of Titian and Tintoretto beautifully revives the pictorial compactness, the structural soundness, of painting. It goes on to unparalleled achievements in volume-space organization. It makes painting a symphonic rather than a melodic art. It is from this source, moreover, that El Greco picks up the impulse to his superbly contrapuntal art, El Greco who is to preserve and utilize the abstract and mobile elements in painting, and to become—so masterly is he in this matter of plastic creation—the god of the twentieth-century moderns. In Venice, Titian and Tintoretto (with whom

El Greco studied) match a certain energy and largeness of outward statement and of portrayed life with this other inner life, this symphonic grandeur.

Yet colour is the outwardly striking characteristic. A sort of sensuous glow lies over Giorgione's *Pastoral Symphony*, Titian's *Venuses*, and Veronese's sumptuous banquet scenes and allegories. The colour exists partly, no doubt, in the accessory subject-materials: rich brocades and velvets, fruits, glamorous garden backgrounds or canopied interiors, jewels and shining armour, the crimson and scarlet of ceremonial robes. Yet these may all be absent, and colour, in a deeper sense, still will suffuse the picture. It is inbuilt, is of the fabric of painting as such, not dependent upon subject.

The Italian roots of Venetian painting can be traced back to Florence, to Verona, whence Gentile da Fabriano and Pisanello were called to Venice on commissions in the fifteenth century, and to near-by Padua, where Squarcione had a famous studio-school and Mantegna was practising. The earliest local painters who left creditable work were Giovanni d'Allemagna—or John of Germany—the two Vivarini, who had served an apprenticeship at Padua, and Jacopo Bellini. This last artist is less important as a creator than as an absorber and transmitter of influences. He was a capable, industrious painter. He was strongly influenced by Mantegna, who became his son-in-law. This is a main link with the standard Renaissance realism, for Mantegna owed much to Florentines who had sojourned in Padua, particularly Donatello and Uccello.

Carlo Crivelli shows more individualism. There is a hint of later Venetian opulence in his mechanical and over-linear compositions. A Sicilian, Antonello da Messina, schooled in Flemish naturalism—once a student at Ghent—gave further impetus to the drift toward exact illustration and so-called scientific means, when he came to Venice in 1472, and practised in a manner that may have seemed to his fellow-artists hardly less than miraculous. Dürer, from another part of the North, sojourned in Venice in 1505-1506, and demonstrated another sort of naturalism.

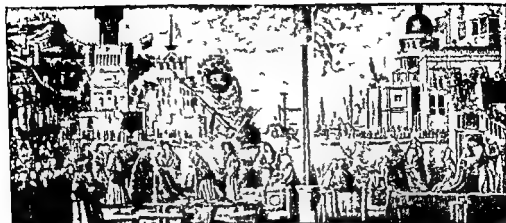
It is as illustrators of the first rank that one must take the next two artists—sometimes termed "the first important Venetian painters"—Vittore Carpaccio and Gentile Bellini, son of Jacopo. In their pictures the pageantry and social activities of Venice come to life. One has exact and endlessly interesting records of civic and religious processions, ceremonies, shipping and social life.



Gentile Bellini: *Miracle of the Holy Cross* Academy Gallery, Venice  
 [Anderson photo courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

Gentile Bellini's contribution being the earlier—he died in 1507—he may be placed first. His panoramic pictures, while unmistakably representing the Venice of his time, are the more likely to have a religious theme, as in *The Preaching of St Mark*. His marshalling of many actors into intelligible groups and his meticulous attention to detail are notable. Of its kind the *Miracle of the Holy Cross* is as great a picture as one can find in all the European output.

Carpaccio learned to crowd in even more of circumstantial detail, with an atmospheric reality seldom equalled. In *St Trephinius Exorcizes a Demon*, he surpasses the Florentines at their own game of creating perfectly believable, minutely detailed records of people and places. Carpaccio almost miraculously gives us sixteenth-century Venice: the palaces and the canals, the campanili and the bridges, the doges and the patricians, the bishops and the courtesans, the gondolas and the galleons, the Orientally rich costumes and the pet dogs. One may recall, however, that the undertaking here is to illustrate the pomp



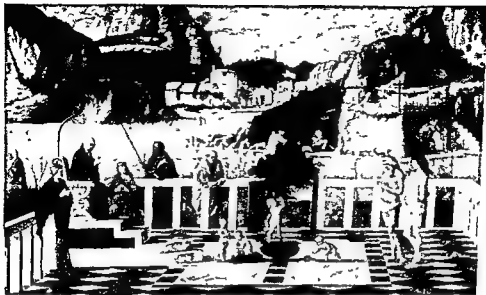
Carpaccio Episode in the St Ursula legend *Academy Gallery, Venice*  
*(Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office)*

and pageantry and colour of Venice Next the richness and splendour will enter into the actual painting medium That will be the truer Venetian art

Ruskin was more than fond of Carpaccio's hard literalness and expert craftsmanship Putting aside certain "higher considerations"—he had been writing about two of Giovanni Bellini's pictures, of their solemnity of purpose and unpretentious simplicity—he describes thus Carpaccio's painting known today as *Courtesans on a Balcony*

Looking only to perfection of execution and essentially artistic power of design, I rank this Carpaccio above either of them, and therefore as in these respects, the best picture in the world I know no other which unites every nameable quality of painter's art in so intense a degree—breadth with minuteness, brilliancy with quietness, decision with tenderness, colour with light and shade all that is faith-fullest in Holland, fancifullest in Venice, severest in Florence, naturalest in England Whatever De Hooghe could do in shade—Van Eyck in detail—Giorgione in mass—Titian in colour—Bewick and Landseer in animal life, is here at once, and I know no other picture in the world which can be compared with it.

It is Giovanni Bellini, younger brother of Gentile, who first measurably suffuses his painting with the gold of Venice He reverts to Madonnas and Crucifixions, and his panoramic works run to idyllic interpretations of the mountain country above the lagoon city rather than to illustrations of its buildings, squares, and canal-streets But the colour and atmosphere and opulent grace characteristic of the place and its life are at last entering into



Giovanni Bellini: *Sacred Allegory*. Uffizi Gallery, Florence  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

the medium itself. Giovanni Bellini, incidentally, lived to the age of eighty-five, painting actively to the end; and was then the venerable, honoured, and chief figure in the midst of a group of renowned artists that included Titian, already thirty-nine years old. Bellini had taught both Titian and Giorgione. The latter had died before the master, at the age of thirty-three, in 1511.

Giorgione of Castelfranco, native of a town in the Alpine foothills above Venice, but sent early to study with Bellini, may have carried with him throughout life some nostalgic affection for the beautiful country of his nativity. Or the Arcadian note in his painting may be a visual echo of the pastoral poetry that gained such great popularity in the Italy of 1500. In any case he ushers in a delicate lyricism that is not at all uncongenial to the Venetian spirit of luxurious languor and holiday relaxation. More important, he carries colour to a fresh degree of emotional expressiveness; and his superb picture-building is the first manifestation of the typical Venetian mastery of form.



Giovanni Bellini *The Feast of the Gods*  
Collection Joseph Widener, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania

Less known than Titian, and author of comparatively few authenticated works, his fame has grown continuously in the recent decades of reappraisal. Giorgione is seen as that miraculous figure, the man who frees himself of contemporary fetters, of rules and influences and academized ways of statement. He cut the ties that were holding Venetian art bound to the Florentine and Paduan tradition. The trend had been away from formal organization toward illustrational documentation, but he returned the painter to a search for formal expressiveness. He practically gave up religious picturing—the famous *Castelfranco Madonna* is the one notable exception—and struck out into a realm of allegory and fancy, and he evolved a plastic method that is poetic, even musical, without violating the limits natural to the painting art.



*Giorgione Soldier and Gypsy Academy Gallery Venice*  
 [Anderson photo courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

It is indeed, Giorgione's greatest original contribution that he restored the formal unity, even the formal grandeur, of painting. Everywhere just then in Rome, in Flanders in slowly awakening Germany, the dispersal of formal structure, the weakening of the basic design element was under way. The structural organism was being forgotten in the haste to be scientific, realistic,



Giorgione *The Pastoral Symphony* Louvre [Arclut es Photographiques]

natural Giorgione restored the three-dimensional framework. He organized the movement elements, orchestrated the volume-space contrasts, the linear directions, the tension and thrust, and the inward-outward fluctuations. Each picture achieves a main rhythm, and then is enriched by minor counterplay. Few things in painting are at once so compact, so strongly alive, and yet so varied as *The Pastoral Symphony*.

*The Concert* (probably worked on by Titian also) is deprived of deep thrust, rather it is flattened and orchestrated in planes. Its area-relationships are as expertly adjusted as those in the most studied of Piero della Francesca's works. In *The Three Philosophers* and the so-called *Soldier and Gypsy* the depth element, the penetration to plane after plane of interest, yet all within a related structure, is again beautifully contrived.

The student not fully trained to recognize this symphonic-structural element—which is the key to the modernist's "search for form" in the twentieth





Giorgione and Titian *Sleeping Venus* State Gallery, Dresden

[Photo courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

century—should be directed to Giorgione's canvases and after that, to Titian Tintoretto and El Greco, who variously carried on the impetus that the genius of Castelfranco initiated.

*The Pastoral Symphony*, even in black-and-white reproduction indicates a sort of colourfulness unknown to European painting up to this time. It is not the decorative richness built up, as in Byzantine and Siennese painting by adding together gold and crimson and patches of profusely ornamented surface. There is, usually, in that decoratively formalized art—enchanting in its own way—a certain loss of depth, a sacrifice of the stronger rhythms of sculptural forms disposed in space. Giorgione picks up the space painting of Florence, organizes the volumes and planes with fresh strength and then proceeds to build the colour into every part. He even adds colour within shadows—an unprecedented thing.

The painters who had discovered light-and-shade as a means of representation had always considered it a technical resource practically separate from colour. The lighted portions of any volume might receive a coating of colour, objective colour: trees green, flesh pink, sky blue, and so forth. But shadows were darkened with a grey-brown overlay. It was Giorgione's dis-



Titian *Venus of Urbino* Uffizi Gallery Florence  
[Photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

covery that shadows harboured mixed colour. He varied colour in both lighted and shaded areas. His treatment gives a warmth and glow to his pictures, a colourfulness perfectly attuned to the ceremonial gaiety and opulent display of Venetian life, at the same time that it expresses Giorgione's own character and temperament.

Titian, born a year before Giorgione, likewise a native of the Venetian hinterland and a student of Giovanni Bellini, lived to be nearly a hundred years old. A plague took Giorgione at the age of thirty-three. It was also a plague that took Titian at the age of ninety-nine, but this was sixty-five years later, in 1576. Thus Titian's work-life may be figured as five times as long as Giorgione's, and certainly his paintings are five times as numerous in the world's galleries.

Although Giorgione was by a year the younger man, he was very truly the master from whom his more renowned associate learned. In their painting

firm in Venice, Titian was the junior partner. At that time, moreover, Titian's method and style were unformed and hardly notable. Giorgione is the truer initiator of the typical Venetian picture: secular, poetic, majestic. After Giorgione's death Titian seems consciously to have made the decision to abandon all other paths and to follow the one opened by his gifted associate.

Titian, or more exactly Tiziano Vecelli, is the most soundly magnificent painter in history. Sane, sober, dignified, he yet is inspired, colourful and far-riding. He had none of Tintoretto's passionate and imaginative impetuosity, little of Michelangelo's extravagant outpouring of power. Yet he belonged with those titan figures, by virtue of strength, largeness of conception, and sureness of touch. Of the half-dozen greatest masters of European painting he is the most even-tempered and dependable. Although proud, opulent, and brilliant, like all the late Venetians, he stands a little apart by reason of a steady balance and a native orderliness. Whether the picture is monumental or seemingly casual, there is an unfailing sense of command, an aristocratic and unfaltering firmness.

Titian is indeed the type-figure of the Venetian artist. Well born, he studied in just those places which would shape an expressive style: first with a mosaicist, then with Gentile Bellini, and finally with Giovanni Bellini. After that came the all important partnership with Giorgione. He was by no means precocious. Practically every one of his important pictures is dated after 1517, when he was forty. But soon after that he was the intimate of dukes, princes, cardinals and literary men, and commissions were urged on him by faraway kings and popes.

His earliest important work outside Venice was at the ducal court of Mantua in 1523. From then on, through fifty years, he was to go forth, between successes at home, to triumphs at Milan, Ferrara, Augsburg and other courts. The Emperor Charles V, whose "German" empire just then included almost half of Europe (and technically most of America) bought Titian's services with large payments of money, generous honours and titles and pensions of dubious value (the artist's correspondence is picturesquely filled with duns and complaints about this). The imperial interludes resulted in expressive portraits of the Emperor and his aristocracy.

At home Titian had his own palace-studio from which he carried on diplomatic relationships with patrons among neighbours and abroad. He painted for the Venetian Council a large historical picture for the Doges' Palace (though he finished it only under threats twenty-one years after



*Titian Sacred and Profane Love Borghese Gallery, Rome*  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

receiving the commission and advance payments) At the same time he produced religious allegories and lovely Venuses to the market demand

Despite his wealth he seems to have been abstemious and careful in his personal tastes as compared with his fellow-Venetians Music was his only passion outside painting Widowed early, he was apparently only an observer of the buxom women whom he painted as Venuses and nymphs These are Venetian through and through—of a mature, opulent type, sex-conscious without self-consciousness, nobly erotic His house seems to have been a noted centre for entertainment and merriment, and something of this is implicit in his rich painting method However, when Titian, nearing eighty was deprived of most of those dearest to him, and his home bereft of gaiety he merely took refuge in more intense application to his art Curiously enough, the great religious pictures of his last period are interspersed among some of the master's loveliest and most sensual nudes His final picture, however, was a *Pietà*, and in it the artist painted his own figure reaching out to the Christ

As painting pure and simple Titian's work is most notable for the perfection of those qualities which he took over from Giorgione. No one else is quite so sure in plastic construction, in the arrangement of compact, strongly impelled forces, in powerful movement confined in closed rhythms And there is a glory of colour within an abiding fullness of all surface-sensuous elements

These values inhere most gorgeously in the mythological pieces and in

some of the monumental religious compositions. For a study of picture-building as such there is hardly anywhere in history (unless it be in El Greco's achievement) a "run" of paintings so important as Titian's pastoral and mythological scenes with nudes. The *Sacred and Profane Love*, comparatively early and very Giorgionesque in conception and in detail, is less compact and unified than the lovely *Venus of Urbino* and the *Venus with a Mirror*.

In the same vein but even more dynamic are such late masterpieces as *The Rape of Europa* and *Bacchanal*. Among the religious pictures the plastic rhythm is exceptionally strong in the famous *Madonna of the Pesaro Family*, and again, with more variation, in the *Assumption*, which critics used to account one of the three or four greatest pictures in the world.

Titian is no less the master when he addresses himself to the simpler task of the portrait-painter. The early *Man with the Glove* is a superbly contrived thing, apparently as exact as photography could have made it, but built on as expert knowledge of pictorial engineering as is the *Venus of Urbino*. Thirty years later Pope Paul III is no less beautifully stabilized in a frame, and is given more solidity, is made sculpturally three-dimensional. As psychological portraiture, too, this is very fine.

Incidentally, *Pope Paul III* is one of Titian's paintings that affords a hint of certain technical means which he will presently hand on to his pupil El Greco—not excluding what the realists call "deformations" of head and hand for expressive purpose. This very portrait is known, moreover, to have affected Velazquez's manner when he studied it ninety years later. And Titian is the master from whose works the renowned Flemish portraitist Van Dyck was to learn his trade. The Venetian need not fear the comparison. His works are the profounder, the more solid. A certain magnificence in the *Pope Paul III* carries over into the less subtle portrait of Aretino and into a self-portrait, and also, with greater reliance upon colourfulness of surface texture and accessory "properties," into the celebrated picture of the artist's daughter Lavinia. Despite the surpassing quality of the portrait-group, Titian's larger contribution is in the pastoral and allegorical pieces.

Titian is oftenest described as the most musical of painters, and the adjective commonly used is "symphonic." The description is more than usually apt, particularly now when the moderns speak of formal orchestration as the basic virtue of great painting art. One might expect that when this great master had gone, Venice would have been left with composers of only a



*Titian Pope Paul III and His Nephews National Museum, Naples  
[Anderson photo courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]*

secondary and reflective genius—such indeed were a half-dozen decorators and portraitists who may be found in the museums. On the other hand there is another painter who if not for all tastes the equal of Titian, is one of the titans. He lacks the melodic clarity of the elder man, and also the glamorous joyous, open-hearted directness. But the term “symphonic” belongs equally to his work, and he surpasses the other in imaginative vigour and compressed animation. Titian the oftener devotes his genius to the sensuous, and even carnal, aspects of life. Tintoretto reaches for insubstantial glories and mystic hidden overtones. By that token his colour is more sombre, but he achieves



Tintoretto *Fight of the Angel Michael with Satan* State Gallery Dresden  
[Photo courtesy German Radio's Information Office]

an equally marvellous luminosity by his flamelike patterning of light and shade

He was known as Tintoretto because he was the son of a dyer. His real name was Jacopo Robusti. There is a legend to the effect that shortly after he was sent as a pupil to the studio of Titian, the master happened upon a group of his sketches and straightway ordered that the boy should never be permitted to enter the studio again, some say because he was jealous of what the sketches promised, others that he could not stand the wild impetuosity and quivering, leaping animation in them. The youth therefore studied in his own way, moodily following this and that impulse to investigation. It is as well, perhaps, that he became no one's apprentice and follower. Instead of permitting a certain isolation, which was his through life, to embitter him and handicap his art, he threw himself the more impetuously into hard work and individualistic experiment. He emerged with a technique and a vision wholly distinctive, and achieved one of the most amazing personal triumphs in the annals of art.

His fellow-painters—good commercialists all, and rightly, since that was the spirit of the time—disliked him because he would give away canvases or sell them for a song, and thus weaken the market. Once he was asked, along with a distinguished group of artists that included Veronese and two eminent Tuscan painters to enter a competition for a mural to be placed on the ceiling of the School of San Rocco, the subject being *The Glory of San Rocco*. When the day of the decision came, and the other painters hopefully brought in sketches, they were surprised to find that in the brief time allowed, Tintoretto had worked feverishly and finished his painting, and had, moreover, caused it to be inserted in the actual ceiling panel the better to display its worth. The question being raised whether he were not unfairly winning the commission and the fee, he retorted that he knew no other way to work, and settled the financial insinuation by giving the painting to the school. Incidentally, he had pushed his style, more than had been his custom, over toward the baroque manner just then becoming fashionable in Florence, in order to forestall criticism from those who might wish to turn the commission to his two Tuscan competitors.

Tintoretto seems always to have remained a solitary among the artists of Venice (although at home he had a wife and eight children). Perhaps the memory of Titian's repudiation of him as a youth never quite faded away, he was urged from within constantly to push his work forward and to force



every opening Public recognition of his genius could not be long delayed, and yet it was often grudging

Pietro Aretino, that picturesque literary-political ruffian who had taken refuge in Venice and who was an intimate of Titian, gave his valuable endorsement to the then young Tintoretto Later he reversed his attitude and joined in depreciating the man, for which Tintoretto took his own sort of revenge when the vain Aretino decided that after all he must have his portrait done by so famous a master Placing the writer on the model-stand, Tintoretto got out a great pistol and ostentatiously waved it about his startled and apprehensive sitter, but ended by explaining that he was using the weapon as a measuring-stick, Aretino being three pistols high He never heard criticism from that quarter again

If such incidents indicate a temperament and a manner incurably individualistic, tending toward eccentricity in a time when artists were in general diplomatic, social, and eager to please patrons and public, there is nonetheless a quality in Tintoretto's work that is essentially Venetian There are idyllic figure pieces which could have been done only by a painter following on the advance made by Giorgione and Titian There is everywhere the luminosity that belongs to this school, and certainly the exuberance of statement is of the time and the place The opulent life is expressed by Titian in one way, through the sanest and most balanced of temperaments It is the same life that is responsible for the largeness and colourfulness of the younger man's outpourings, but expressed through his subjective impetuosity and inspirational method

For all his individualism, it is well to remember that the youthful Tintoretto once stated his ideal as "the drawing of Michelangelo with the colouring of Titian" It may have been only a schoolboy precept, chalked on his studio wall after some vision had come to him of a work to be done but it is clarifying even today Only Michelangelo was ever quite so prodigal, no one else so beautifully understood the arbitrary use of the human body in the creation of plastic rhythms It is significant that in going to Rome for tutelage Tintoretto was fascinated by Michelangelo alone, totally overlooking the Raphaelesque neo-classicism.

Here, then, is the third of the giants in the Venetian culmination most imaginative and most dramatic of all Hugely prolific, he suffers often from the inevitable faults of the inspirational worker Some canvases too obviously betray the impatience of his nature and the hurry of his method There are



Tintoretto *Bacchus and Ariadne* Doge's Palace, Venice  
 [Anderson photo courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

pictures confused, windy, even chaotic. The patterns of light are too tempestuous, exciting without finally spelling compositional repose. But in an extraordinary range of works the herculean energy is brought under control, the excitement is held in bounds, the vast plan is unified: the multiple rhythms confined within a visually comprehensible—and gorgeously stimulating—pictorial achievement.

Tintoretto is, indeed, the equal of Giorgione and Titian when he cares to limit his composition to a few figures related in tension and balance. He can be as neatly compact as any one in dealing with strong movement and heavy volumes suspended in equilibrium. His *Bacchus and Ariadne* and *Adam and Eve* and *Mercury and the Graces* are outstanding examples of orchestration.

around the main motive of a few dominating volumes in space Master of lighting that he is—one of the greatest—he often enough arbitrarily puts light and shade where he creatively wants them, out of tune with nature no doubt, but æsthetically justified In his nudes, as here, he employs none of the inviting sexual attitudes and implications known to Titian Bodies are beautifully sculpturesque and luminous, but solid rather than of a melting voluptuousness

Impersonally considered, the human body is utilized by Tintoretto with a virtuosity equalled only by that of Michelangelo The man or woman is foreshortened or lengthened as may be compositionally right, and may be seen from any arbitrarily chosen angle, if the volume rhythm or linear pattern is thereby served Tintoretto made up wax figures and studied them from all angles, and placed them in boxes so shuttered that light would strike them from one direction after another He was studying the body not for individuality or for revealing attitude but as an item in creative organization of volume, line, and light-dark patterning

The result is seen in the very simple *Bacchus and Ariadne* at Venice, in the more varied *Mars, Venus, and the Three Graces* at Chicago, and subtly in the very different *Christ with Mary and Martha* at Munich This last is a symphonic picture if any exists There are major and minor movements, contrasting yet related, with the arbitrary bending of the figures creating the central full-volume rhythm or compositional theme Nor, beyond these abstract, purely æsthetic values, appealing subconsciously, is there any lack of spiritual truth and objective interest In fact, the Bible parable is concerned with originality and stated explicitly

Tintoretto is the better known for the more ambitious and monumental things for churches and public halls His *Paradise* in the Doges' Palace is literally as big as a house, actually the largest painted canvas in existence. It really is too large to be seen as a whole Enjoyment of it—though one does definitely feel a cosmic magnificence—comes down to the matter of studying "passages" one at a time No other painting approaches so closely to Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment*, in the pleasure it affords in this manner Group after group among the hundreds of figures will be found to have compositional unity and dynamic effectiveness The *Paradise* was painted, incidentally, after the artist had turned seventy, and he scandalized his fellow-painters by refusing, as excessive, an extra fee voted to him by the city fathers after the unveiling and the popular acclaim



Tintoretto *Christ with Mary and Martha* Alte Pinakothek, Munich  
[Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

There is no painter upon whose merits and demerits the critics so disagree, and the works chosen as masterpieces vary greatly from critic to critic. Most popular, perhaps, are *The Origin of the Milky Way*, in London, a superbly opulent decoration but somewhat crowded, and *The Miracle of St Mark*, in Venice, which is characteristic but over on the tumultuous side. The great panoramic pictures like the *San Rocco Crucifixion*, the *Massacre of the Innocents*, and the *Battle by Land and Sea* please some, while others, seeking more of severity and clarity, go back to the *Bacchus and Ariadne*. Recently the school of appreciation which finds form-organization basic in the evocation of æsthetic pleasure has turned attention to Tintoretto's extraordinary handling of light-and-dark patterning, in conjunction with his marshalling of figures in space. The swirling volumes of his main rhythms and the contrapuntal play of flame-like draperies and light-streaked edges afford a formal effect paralleled only in El Greco. And new attention is directed to pictures like the *Fight of the Archangel Michael and Satan* and the *Christ with Mary and Martha* for observation of these virtues.

It is eloquent of the imagination and reach of Tintoretto that he could score so variously. That the quality he handed on to El Greco is being revived in the twentieth century as the animating principle of "modernism" is but one sign of his transcending genius. Incidentally he was a very great portraitist, though definitely a notch below the supreme Titian.

There is yet one more painter to be mentioned as adding to the glory of Venetian painting, although he is hardly worthy of a place beside Titian and Tintoretto. When Paolo Caliari of Verona, later to be known universally as Veronese, went to Venice in 1555, he was already an accomplished artist, successful at twenty-seven. Perhaps if he had gone at seventeen instead, he would have absorbed the one thing he lacks out of the typical Venetian equipment—form-understanding. As it is, his work is external and not a little flat. The spirited colour is that depicted from the subject, rather than that which is inbuilt. He is all on the surface. His magnificence is that of gay costume, architectural grandeur, and processional movement.

Let us not make any mistake. Veronese's pictures are decorative, they are charmingly alive, they are full of brilliant passages and gaily decked backgrounds. The "furniture" is unfailingly grand. At times he can trick a picture in the sound tradition of ordered form till one would swear, except for the signature, that Tintoretto had had a hand in it. But the characteristic things



Tintoretto *Portrait of Jacopo Sansovino* Uffizi Gallery, Florence  
 [Photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

are the loosely constructed murals seen at the Villa Maser, and the banqueting and pageantry scenes common to all art-history books. Sumptuous, colourful, Venetian. But in them there is an atmosphere of artificial stage-setting, of contrived grandeur. One is getting back to the opulence illustrated, not imparted out of the painter's soul and craftsmanship. Hence the subjects are usually ceremonial occasions—or historical episodes ceremonially treated—within halls richly colonnaded and banner-hung, with crowds of richly costumed people.

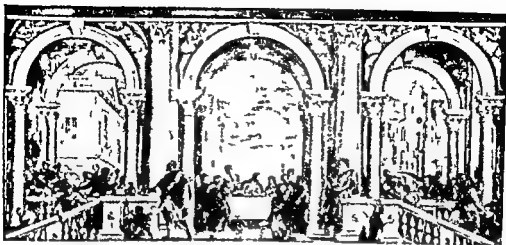
Such are the ceiling piece in the Doges' Palace, called the *Apotheosis of Venice*, and most famous of all, the *Feast in Levi's House*, as magnificent a piece of contrived scenery as one could ask. Just there is the point on his own superficial decorative ground, Veronese is supreme. But he is theatrical where



Veronese: *The Rape of Europa* Doges' Palace, Venice  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

Tintoretto is dramatic. The latter's imagination and conviction are absent; and of the sober poetry of Giorgione and Titian there is no trace. Above all, the painting-structure is relaxed, weakened.

Once one has passed beyond the work of Giovanni Bellini, one finds the succession of giants—Giorgione, Titian, Tintoretto—so overwhelmingly important and absorbing that there is danger of overlooking artists who are called "minor" only because of the shadowing eminence of these geniuses. If he had appeared in any other than this Golden Age, Palma Vecchio would be accounted a considerable figure. It is true that his virtues seem derivative: he followed with, rather than helped to initiate, the rich glow, the luminous patterning, and the full but balanced compositions of his contemporaries.



*Veronese Feast in Levi's House Academy Gallery, Venice*  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

Giorgione and Titian But in *The Meeting of Jacob and Rachel* and the *Sacred Conversation*, favourite canvases, he adds a distinctive softening fluency, in a manner agreeable and catching It is only after analysis that one notes that the figures are rather obviously posed and the scenery a bit insubstantial

A pupil and associate of Palma, Bonifazio, is likewise a respected painter of the second rank, whose best pictures are in the Giorgionesque tradition, though without the masterly compactness and fullness *The Diana and Actæon* at Oxford is outstanding Paris Bordone, who lived as did these other two entirely within the lifetime of Titian, failed to absorb either the poetry of conception or the sound plastic means distinguishing the great Venetian art of the time, but he painted one outstanding and very popular show-piece, *The Ring of St Mark Presented to the Doge* It is justly starred in all the guide-books to Venice It is notable among historical ceremonial works of art, its stage-setting grandeur failing to distract seriously from the successful figure arrangement A fine, superficial, story-telling piece of invention

More solid but with an unfortunate woodenness is Lorenzo Lotto's variation of the current way of painting He had more originality than the other minor artists, the *St Jerome* in the Louvre being notable as an experiment in arranged, super-imposed planes (almost in the twentieth-century Cubist method), and as a distinctly advanced study of landscape for its own sake



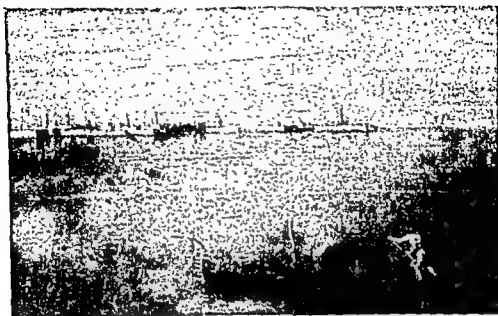
an attitude or gesture, not a whisker or wrinkle, not a button or minutest fold of embroidered goods, escapes notice and immortalization, as you may verify from *A Tailor* in London, or *The Warrior* in New York, or *The Bergamask Captain* at Worcester. These pictures are beautifully lighted, too, and often glamorously coloured. All they lack is the element that would make them live as paintings, rather than persist as exact portraits. As it is, the sitter is miraculously fixed, perfectly perpetuated, photographically immortalized.

It was more than a century later that the same painstaking realism was brought into service in the production of picturesque "views" in *édité* art, as the Italians succinctly have it. In the canvases of Antonio Canale, commonly called Canaletto, who was born in 1697, the Venetian canals and shipping are glamorously and faithfully portrayed. It is a revival, in a sense, of Carpaccio's topographical and documentary art of two and one-half centuries earlier, but with the ease of manner and luminous atmosphere possible after the colour-synthesis achieved in Titian's century. A nephew of Canale, who also took the name Canaletto, carried on acceptably in the *édité* tradition. But it was Francesco Guardi who gave a fresh turn to the genre, adding a sparkling lightness and brilliant contrasts of light and shadow. Here realism, helped immensely by the natural picturesqueness of the Venetian scene, is further enhanced by a brilliantly staccato accenting and an opalescent veiling. It is souvenir art at its best.

Canale was the son of a painter of stage-settings but escaped into service of the real. A contemporary of his, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, on the other hand avoids the slide toward realism and reverts to what is little more than theatrical decoration. He owes something to Veronese—not a safe model—but is more capricious, sketchy, even slap-dash. There is freshness of colour in his works: there is unbounded verve, there is virtuosity. But there is little sound foundation in design.

Tiepolo used to be called "the last of the great succession," and his murals were noted for "splendour" and "drama." But today he is instructive chiefly as signaling the sickness that had overtaken Italian art. His canvases are generally empty, his effects stagy, his colourfulness superficial. The form-organization of Giorgione and Titian has utterly disappeared: the movement is dispersed, the organism shattered. Figures float about unrelated in any architectural scheme, picturesque bits of nature are casually dropped in.

The date, of course, is now well down in the era that is called baroque elsewhere—but this is not baroque art of the stamp of Rubens and Bernini. Other



Guardi: *View of the Lagoon*. Poldi Pezzoli Gallery, Milan  
[Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

chapters, tracing the Renaissance impetus in Spain, Flanders, and Germany will intervene before we turn to that development.

Having touched upon realism, however, as one of the two directions of degeneration, one may add here a note upon the end of Renaissance "scientific" painting in natural-as-life depictions of everyday people and incidents, as practised not in Venice but in Rome and Naples. Caravaggio is the great figure: an outstanding innovator in that he challenged those who were carrying on the pretty neo-classicism popularized by Raphael, and particularly the "grand manner" of Giulio Romano and the Caracci. But when Caravaggio had mastered the natural light-and-shade technique, and had gone to the streets and taverns for characters and incidents, he failed to create an art more acceptable than that of his pompous enemies. He took refuge in forcing his lighting and melodramatizing his everyday scenes—and here is the beginning of the art of Ribera, of Murillo, of Delacroix. He made an enormous success in his own time, and appropriately died as the result of a brawl; without learning that he had led painting into a side-pocket, not a main vein. After him, Salvator Rosa found material for the new natural art in nature (which



Sebastiano del Piombo: *Venus and Adonis*. Uffizi Gallery, Florence  
 [Anderson photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

There is, of course, no landscape painting as a separate category in Renaissance times. In portraiture Lotto pushes on also toward the goal of exact documentary representation. The canvas known as *The Sick Man* is one of the most convincing realistic portraits painted up to Lotto's time, having sound pictorial structure along with exactness of statement and psychological insight.

Where Lotto was introspective, religious-minded, and apart from the main Venetian current, his contemporary Sebastiano del Piombo floated with the stream. Working frankly in the Giorgionesque manner, he painted one picture obviously in the master's style, but as obviously without the master's sensitive adjustment: the famous *Venus and Adonis* of the Uffizi. Having gone from Venice to Rome, and gained a sense of monumental painting construction from Michelangelo, he did some religious pictures which at least are more commanding than the contemporaneous products of the School of Rome. But Sebastiano's better claim to notice is in his solidly impressive portraits, which are not without Michelangesque implications.

As a portraitist, however, there is one other—last of the sixteenth-century



Moroni *The Bergamasque Captain* [Courtesy Worcester Art Museum]

Venetians to be mentioned—who excels in a distinctive way. Precisely because he is the ultimate Renaissance realist, Giambattista Moroni occupies a prominent niche in all leading galleries. He lays out the main areas of his picture with a sufficient understanding of surface composition, but other values are sacrificed to a meticulous, photographic exactitude.

Even Titian noted that Moroni's likenesses were more "faithful" than his own, and when he could not take portrait commissions he urged his clients to go to this first of all the truly camera-eyed artists among the Italians. Not

an attitude or gesture, not a whisker or wrinkle, not a button or minutest fold of embroidered goods, escapes notice and immortalization, as you may verify from *A Tailor* in London, or *The Warrior* in New York, or *The Bergamask Captain* at Worcester. These pictures are beautifully lighted, too, and often glamorously coloured. All they lack is the element that would make them live as paintings, rather than persist as exact portraits. As it is, the sitter is miraculously fixed, perfectly perpetuated, photographically immortalized.

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*Guardi: View of the Lagoon Poldi Pezzoli Gallery, Milan*  
[Anderson photo courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

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Caravaggio had somehow overlooked), and the next phase is picturesque landscape. He specialized in ruins and stormy skies and craggy shores.

Many historians, however, place the blame for the ruination of Italian painting less upon the realists than upon the Bolognese eclectics. Particularly they mark the artists of the Caracci family as having made a formula for fine painting, partly out of antiquarian study, partly out of Raphael's surface mannerisms, and partly out of a misunderstanding of the grand style, which they thought was apotheosized in the rather slack Correggio.

The Caracci founded an academy and school, and their influence soon went out in all directions. There is no doubt that Caravaggio's realism was in the air and helped to determine subsequent proceedings. Perhaps mutually anti-thetic ingredients—nature, melodrama, and a sublime manner—were being poured in together. In general the Caracci effort passed off in over-vigorous action, sentimentalization, and a bulbous pompousness.

After the Caracci themselves, Guido Reni and Domenichino are the only still-popular names. The one did a fresco—the *Aurora*—which is endlessly reproduced, with reasons explainable enough if not profound. The other reverted sufficiently toward the ideals of Perugino and Raphael, with a little of the recent influence of the Venetians, to be accounted a belated and sometimes rewarding idealist.

But Domenichino was so much out of his time that the realists of Naples conspired to silence him by murder—in 1641—and either actually poisoned him or drove him to the bitter death of one frustrated and broken by overwhelming opposition. Therein is more than a hint of what was happening to dignified and imaginative art in that turbulent seventeenth century.

If the Renaissance be reckoned—as it is by critics enough—as marking saliently the rediscovery of "reality," as the turning-point into modern realism, the first cycle is now complete. Venice has had its day, the most glorious one in the calendar of Italian art. Its artists stayed the current which had earlier set in toward science and rationalism and documentary reality, and restored and heightened the formal values, even to the point of gorgeously symphonic expression with the added glory of colour out of the East. Giorgione, Titian, and Tintoretto had made painting live with a fullness not known in Europe before. It is their disciple, Domenico Theotocopuli of Candia, known as El Greco, who alone will carry the full splendour of the painting art into the next era.

## CHAPTER XX



### *El Greco and Catholic Spain*

SINCE the Bronze Age the Spanish Peninsula has been a melting-pot of diverse peoples. It is fitting, then, that the foremost artist of Spain should be a Greek born in Crete, tutored by the Venetian colourists, and brought to Toledo by way of Rome.

In the background are the blood-strains of Iberians, Phœnicians, Romans, of Vandals and Visigoths, of Moors and of those Frenchmen who in the eleventh and twelfth centuries poured over the Pyrenees in the Holy Wars against the Saracens. The language is Latin as modified by successive invaders. The arts constitute Europe's most vivid illustration of the mixture of cultures. Oriental and Western, Christian and pagan. Utterly different monuments of purest style stand side by side: an early Christian church of substantially Syrian form, an Arab mosque, and a Gothic cathedral. In other examples the styles are inextricably mingled: there are buildings that can be called neither Byzantine nor Saracenic and yet are both. In one period the Lombard motives are grafted onto the already mixed "native" design. At one end of the shelf of Spanish pottery are pieces proclaiming themselves purest Persian, along with apparently Coptic and Moresque examples (the latter with Arabic inscriptions decoratively used), and toward the other end panels unmistakably della Robbia, faience of French type, and finally porcelain statuettes that speak exactly the language of Meissen.

In that post-medieval hour in which we are taking up the story of art in Spain, in the early sixteenth century, the Spaniards are more than ever international-minded. The Moors have been conquered after five centuries of wars, and Spain itself is united though its blood is mixed. The king is German, a Habsburg. His viceroys and overlords rule Naples, Sicily, and the Netherlands. The crown owns the Americas. There is free intercourse with the



Italian art centres, through Naples on the one hand, and through the German court which claims dominion over half of Europe on the other. The king's walls at Madrid bear proudly the masterpieces of Titian, beside the works of van Eyck and van der Weyden and Bosch.

And yet, subjected to so many varied Renaissance influences, Spanish art remains almost broodingly Spanish. In a time when the Church of Rome is most slack and undirectioned and all the rest of Europe is torn by religious schism and war, Spain characteristically remains fanatically Catholic. This rectitude is of the nature of the mountainous and rock-bound country—and of its art too. This is, indeed, the most extreme example of a country invaded by heterogeneous styles and peoples, yet forging the local and imported materials and impulses into a generally recognizable national style.

The Renaissance, at first an Italian development, then a movement that pushes into all the central Northern European countries, is slowest in spreading over Spain, and then its influence is thin. If considered only in its cultural aspect, it is doubtful whether there is a Spanish Renaissance. The commercial and explorative expansion, which accompanied the cultural awakening elsewhere, is stirringly present, in the conquest and exploitation of the Americas. In religious progress, on the other hand, Spain is reactionary. There is no sympathy with the Reformation here. On the contrary, Spain begets the Catholic Reaction. It is the Spaniards who lead in forcing the Vatican to purge itself of corruption and a worldly paganism. The Jesuits, organized in Spain by St. Ignatius of Loyola, are foremost in re-establishing the authority and enterprise of Catholicism, whether by education and reform or by the burning of heretics. Where the Northern reformers have not undermined Romanism beyond saving, the Jesuits enter to build new churches and establish schools.

The backwardness of Spain in the figurative arts is more than a little due to the uncompromising puritanism, not to say the fanatic bigotry, of the Church Fathers, and their moral control over king, courtier, and citizen. When Italy was glorying in pagan allegory and Parnassian idyll, and lovely naked Venuses paraded in the galleries beside coy and lifelike Italian mistresses, the nude was strictly forbidden in Spain. Even study from the undraped body was considered a sin. Until the time of Velazquez there will be no nude females—and then for two centuries there is only *his* one lonely *Venus*.

The church has, indeed, precise regulations for pictures. They prohibit



Altar frontal, Catalan, 12th or 13th century, illustrating Byzantine influence  
[Courtesy Worcester Art Museum]

such heretical representations as angels with beards, imps of Hell with wings, or the Virgin's robe in any style other than that declared by the Church to be historically truthful. It is heresy to show the Virgin's feet. There is a censor, an officer of the Church, to watch art and report violations to "the Lords of the Inquisition."

Regarding these prohibitions, two views are possible. Every artist is irked by the very thought of censorship, and most art-lovers will cry bravo to Edward Hutton's denunciation of the Church Fathers.

Thus the Spanish Church gathered all things to herself, and having already robbed one of the noblest peoples in Europe of its intellect and poisoned the springs of learning, she proceeded with an ignorant brutality, without precedent in Europe, to spoil art, too, of all its treasures, divorcing it from life, the which in its splendour and nobility she had ever feared and denounced, enslaving it and enforcing upon it in her service every menial task, setting it to illustrate every disgraceful and stupid lie, every abominable ugliness that here in Spain she had been able successfully to thrust upon the world. All power seems to have been given her in heaven and on earth, nor has she hesitated to use it for her own advantage to the utmost, against humanity.

The other view is that the burning faith itself fed the ardour of the artist, that the painters of the time probably did not feel themselves unduly shackled. They worked within the faith, and the overwhelming preponderance of religious subjects is a reflection of their interest—at least until they had travelled in Italy. There are many reports of artists' partaking of the sacrament before commencing a painting and even of preparatory shriving and penance.

Nevertheless, intolerance does impede the free diffusion of art, and Spain, descending to the most frightful period of the Inquisition just at the culminating moment of the Italian Renaissance, definitely set up barriers to the free activity of the æsthetic spirit. The story is told that the renowned Italian sculptor Torrigiano, a contemporary of Michelangelo and Benvenuto Cellini, having made a statue of the Madonna for a Spanish aristocrat and then disagreeing with his patron over the price, smashed the figure into fragments, whereupon the Inquisition condemned him for impiety. The sculptor starved himself to death in his dungeon cell rather than be burnt alive.

It is illuminating that the neck-ruff and billow-skirt came into fashion in Europe out of the Spanish effort to hide the natural body as completely as possible. Figuratively the iron corsets of the fashionable gentlemen bound art too.

The early painting of Spain shows the general European diversity, from the twelfth century to the beginning of the fifteenth there was effort of various kinds—illuminated manuscripts, murals, and countless religious panels and shrines. While a new art of painting was budding in Siena, Avignon, and Cologne, there were many local schools of artists in the two main divisions of Spanish territory, Castile and Aragon. In the first, Northern influences were earlier felt, in the other there were continuing contacts with Italy and other Mediterranean centres of commerce and culture. Farther back the traditions are those of the rest of Christian Europe, most notably of Byzantine iconography, and of the art of illumination that had been originally Byzantine but was now being gradually Gothuized.

Aragon might have developed a religious painting as distinctive as the Siennese—and even more Oriental, colourful, since the Saracens had brought in a second wave of formalized colour art, out of the East. But the surviving works are, with notable and welcome exceptions, curiously lacking in the naive virtues that Duccio and his contemporaries were attaining in Siena at the end of the thirteenth century. There is early a sophisticated elaboration



*St John the Evangelist and St John the Baptist* Portion of retable, early 16th century  
[Courtesy Hispanic Society of America]

about them. They are ornamentally florid or, as pictures, over-detailed. Incidentally, they soon come to be loaded with excessive molasses-like colour. The simple linear harmonies, the naïve directness of statement, and the transparency of colour so notable in the works of the gentle Franciscans are missing in the Spanish gallery. Where Duccio edged draperies delicately with a line of gold, the Spaniards built up wide gilded borders.

It becomes clear as soon as one has seen the typical Spanish pre-Renaissance painting, that a Northern current of illustrators' naturalism has been crossed with the local native stream. The tie with the Netherlands is not alone political but cultural. As early as 1429 Jan van Eyck, Flemish innovator, had visited Castile, Andalusia, and Granada. Thenceforward there is a steady flow of Flemish paintings into Spain. Native craftsmen hasten to absorb the surface

characteristics of this fashionable imported art. It is nearly a century later that one encounters the first often-mentioned Spanish painter, Pedro Berruguete, to whom is ascribed a three-part altar-piece at Avila. It is competent and well managed as *illustrational painting*, and the *Northern idioms* are obvious.

At about this time a renewed tide of influence set in from Italy too. All through the sixteenth century the advocates of the Flemish manner waged war with the invading Italians, or with the Spaniards who had been tutored in Italy. In general the two parties worked to a single end, since the Flemings had been realists from the start, and the Florentine and Roman Italians were just completing the cycle from naive decoration to neo-classic realism. The differences were more of method: the one working for exquisitely detailed and finished verisimilitude, the other tending to a more monumental effect and an appearance of facile lifelikeness.

These two reference points established, there is a certain interest in tracing individual artists' loyalty to the one school or the other. Juan de Juanes leaned more to the Italian though adding a Spanish intensity of feeling, while Luis de Morales has the Flemish enamel-like finish, very shiny, and miniature fidelity. He is the most appealing and the most considerable painter up to his time. The native note in his unfailingly religious pictures is sorrowful rather than agonized. The Spaniards have called him "Morales the Divine." His heads sometimes suggest the elongation later to be noted as a mannerism of El Greco. A third sixteenth-century painter, Pedro de Campaña, combined the Flemish and Italian influences at first hand, since he was born in Brussels (though of Dutch extraction, originally named Kampeneer), passed his apprenticeship in Rome, being a disciple particularly of Raphael, and spent his mature artistic life in Seville, a city now wealthy and enterprising because of Columbus's discoveries. But he lacks something of Spanish fire.

Another effective Italianizer was Luis de Vargas, a Spaniard who spent twenty-eight years in Rome before settling down to spread the Raphaellesque gospel at home. That he remained more Spanish than Italian in spirit, and more medieval than Renaissance, is indicated by stories of his asceticism and self-scourging. He kept an open coffin by his bed, and lay in it often, that he might remember the lessons of death. By contrast, one may recall the sunny spirit and the resultant radiant art of such Italian painters as Giotto and Fra Angelico.

There were, besides, actual Italian artists, of the second rank, who were brought by King Philip II to decorate the Escorial Palace and its chapels.

Titian was here more briefly too, as visiting court painter. As an influence in the other direction there was one Antonio Moro, a Flemish portraitist who also was resident at the Spanish court, where he did tight, natural likenesses. His pupil, Alonso Sanchez Coello, became a famous painter in this specialty. His precise and over-detailed portraits are treasured in the great museums today. He in turn had a pupil-successor at the court, Juan Pantoja de la Cruz, who is a shade less convincing. This line was to lead on to Velazquez, who will transform the naturalism into an agreeable selective realism, in beautiful technique.

But with the successes of Pantoja de la Cruz one has crossed into the seventeenth century. By 1600 El Greco has been twenty-five years in Spain. He is so immeasurably greater a figure than any one else mentioned in the chapter so far that everything before his time seems like preparation. Not a Spaniard himself, and probably thirty years old at the time of his arrival in Toledo, he somehow makes himself the most Spanish of painters—and a master worthy to stand beside Michelangelo, Titian, and Tintoretto.

Born in Candia, Crete, where Byzantine art had survived in its purest expression, where indeed he may have begun his art studies in a school of icon painting, El Greco went to Venice early in life. There too he could dream in glowing Byzantine chapels, and there too he may have had experience with a school of icon-makers. The earliest known mention places him as a pupil in Titian's studio. While Titian's organizational genius and certain slighter mannerisms are to be detected in El Greco's canvases, he seems to have abandoned consciously the sober and clarified statement of that master in favour of the more imaginative reaches and mystic manner of that other Venetian, Tintoretto. Probably Tintoretto and El Greco both gained a plastic solidity, a sense of rhythmic structural organization, from Titian—but Titian has less affinity with either one than the two have for each other.

There is no direct evidence that the young Greek worked in Tintoretto's studio, but a half-hundred canvases suggest the probability, intimate a spiritual tie as well as the direct transmission of a passionate, flamelike, mediævally intense way of working.

El Greco is next heard of in Rome, about 1570, where indubitably he studied the works of Michelangelo (there is a portrait of the latter inserted, along with one of Titian, in a religious picture by El Greco now in Minneapolis), though he rejected much of Michelangelo's method in favour of



*El Greco View of Toledo [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

Tintoretto's After his long sojourn in Italy, during which he thus had had some sort of contact with the three greatest painters of the Italian Renaissance, El Greco went to Spain probably in 1575. It is part of the measure of his genius that after his long experience of Venice and Rome, his art could not possibly be mistaken for Italian. He is incorruptibly a personality, spiritually he becomes a part of Spain.

Aloofness and pride seem to have been in El Greco's character along with the mystic's self-effacement in the search of God. Living in Toledo, stronghold of chivalric Catholicism, home of the most tortured asceticism, a city so irredeemably medieval that the royal court, slightly liberal in thought and outlook, had moved from there to Madrid, he was the familiar of Inquisitor and grandee.

A Spanish writer of the generation after El Greco's says that "Domenico Greco"—thus, in the Italian form—"came to this city with a high reputation.

His nature was extravagant like his painting. He used to say that no price was high enough for his works, and so only gave them in pledge to buyers, who willingly advanced him what he asked for. He earned much money, but spent it in great pomp and display in his house, even keeping paid musicians to entertain him at his meals. He had few disciples as none cared to follow his capricious and extravagant style, which was suitable only to himself." He had a pupil and helper, however, in his son, who was not a genius.

The artist's library of Greek and Italian classics bears further witness to his cultural breadth and his discriminating love for the other arts. The enriched life thus indicated, combined with the man's predilections for solitude and contemplation, may be considered in some sort a key to the combination of intensified sense-appeal and austere abstraction in his art. No one else has so overlaid his subject-matter and inner design with so rich a play of moving rhythmic forms, with so fiery an orchestration of visual elements. Yet underneath is the soundest plastic structure, the most nearly infallible handling of the skeleton of abstract elements, known to Western painting.

For forty years El Greco worked in Spain, almost continuously, so far as is recorded, in rocky Toledo, of which he made one of the earliest European masterpieces in the landscape genre. (The Chinese were past masters of the 'view' at this time.) The *View of Toledo*, now in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, besides having this historical distinction, is a gorgeous example of El Greco's symphonic composition and richly rhythmic surface expression, as well as a revelation of the spirit of the city and its countryside.

Once only, it seems, the Greek of Toledo trembled upon the verge of a fashionable success with other than the Church corporations and dignitaries. At the direction of King Philip II, in 1580, he painted *The Legend of St. Mauritius*, for placement in a chapel in the Escorial. A quarter-century later a Father Siguenza, commenting upon the presence of the picture in a minor





El Greco *Crucifixion* Prado [August L. Mayer Domenico Theotocopuli El Greco]

adheres to the medieval, the Gothic logic, rather than to the Italian or classic.

This modelling by light—this patterning of light, this building of spurts of light into an exciting visual fire, this distortion of light for emotional impact—it all contributes to the most provocative personal style and the most intensely living body of art in European practice. *The Crucifixion*, whether the one in the Louvre or that at Philadelphia, or one at Madrid, sets up the body



*El Greco Christ in the Garden Collection Arthur Sachs, Paris*

on the cross in pitiless white light in a strong main rhythm that dominates the plastic organization. In the first version, the balancing-donor and priest at the foot of the cross complete the figure composition, but the sweep of clouds, with moving masses of dark against the light, creates an unpression of almost turbulent grandeur and emotional power. In the second, with the Christ figure more elongated the two minor figures are crowded to one side of the cross, a balancing landscape with groups of figures is touched in by delicate streaks of light in the opposite corner and the main background is varied only by a few clearly delineated shreds of cloud (very voluminously treated however, where tension is needed). The movement effect is no less compelling. In the third version the artist crowds the canvas with figures,

room of the palace, noted that "it was designed for the altar of the saint, but it did not satisfy His Majesty. It is not much, because it satisfied few, though they say it has great art, and that its author has much knowledge and that excellent things can be seen from his hand"<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the king, surrounded by Flemish and Italian fashionable painters, was mystified and displeased by the work of this man who expressed the soul of that other Spain, and he gave no more commissions to El Greco. The court had its several echoes of Raphael and Romano, and it had Coello and Pantoja. It was soon to have Ribera, then Velazquez.

The Greek was remanded to Toledo for life. It was probably one of the most fortunate failures in art history. At any rate, among the fervid clerics and fanatic hidalgos of the ancient capital, remote from the fashions and politics of the court, he found just the nourishment to bring his individualistic genius to flower. He died in Toledo in 1614, and his works entered into a period of obscurity which lasted well into the twentieth century. Probably it was the king and courtiers who first spread the story that his art was what it was because of insanity.

It is no longer necessary to defend one's enjoyment of El Greco's works, or even to inquire why they so enrage the realist and materialist. But it may be helpful to explore briefly the ways in which he obtains his effects. Fundamentally, as a "builder of pictures," he is supreme in the Western galleries. That is, he handles the abstract values, the structural principles and the instrumental means, of his art for effects of unparalleled richness, vitality, and variety. He orchestrates the movement elements into a symphony marked at once by grandeur and tenderness, by clarity and opulent overtones.

He creates with fullest use of the primary assets of the painting artist, volume-space organization, construction by planes, play by line. Colour alone, of the major resources, he utilizes less generously and less creatively than did his Venetian teachers, but he mutes this element, and along with it incidental pattern, only to achieve the same sort of visual enrichment by an extraordinary surface play of light-shade. No one in the records of painting has so intensified the visual effectiveness of the design by light-dark manipulation. The flame-like swirls and elongated streakings of white contrasting with sombre backgrounds are the most striking external earmark of his art. It will not escape the symbolist that the accent is vertical, aspiring, that the method

<sup>1</sup> This quotation and the one on page 603 are from transcriptions in Charles H. Caffin's *The Story of Spanish Painting*, with slight changes made after comparison with the originals.



El Greco *The Assumption of the Virgin* Detail, suggesting influences of Titian and Michelangelo [Courtesy Art Institute, Chicago]



El Greco *Crucifixion* Prado [August L. Mayer *Domenico Theotocopuli El Greco*]

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El Greco *Christ in the Garden* Collection Arthur Sachs Paris

on the cross in pitiless white light, in a strong main rhythm that dominates the plastic organization. In the first version the balancing-donor and priest at the foot of the cross complete the figure composition but the sweep of clouds, with moving masses of dark against the light creates an impression of almost turbulent grandeur and emotional power. In the second, with the Christ figure more elongated the two minor figures are crowded to one side of the cross, a balancing landscape with groups of figures is touched in by delicate streaks of light in the opposite corner and the main background is varied only by a few clearly delineated shreds of cloud (very voluminously treated however where tension is needed). The movement effect is no less compelling. In the third version the artist crowds the canvas with figures,

even placing the two angels directly under the outstretched arms of Christ, yet the protagonist's figure again dominates the composition, and the play of light on drapery edges creates a counterpoint as rich and strong as that in the other pictures

Because he so usually employs light in this way, as binding element, as the chief means to patterning, El Greco utilizes less than usual the "natural" backgrounds common to most religious picturing of the era. Clouds, rocks, draperies are substituted and frankly manipulated for contrapuntal variation and intensification. Incidentally, the nude Christs of these three pictures are a sufficient answer to those who carelessly assert that the Greek did not excel in nude painting. The nude that is an objective transcription of soft feminine loveliness, in erotic mood, is absent from the list of his works. But there are a score of undraped figures that have both convincing truth and a beautiful fitness to their artistic purpose.

The same ascending flame-like lighting and even greater virtuosity in manipulation of swirling clouds and draperies are seen in the several versions of *Christ in the Garden*. And indeed, few paintings in the world so repay study of the abstract design and the method of obtaining fullness of rhythmic play and counterplay of forms. They are, of course, favourites of the expressionists, who find special pleasure in richly orchestrated plastic elements, even at the expense of distortion of natural aspects.

But it is notable that, when El Greco leaves the field of complex picturing and turns to such a simple problem as a portrait bust, he is likely to build up his composition with similar light patterning—modelling the elongated head with streaked light and repeating the rhythms in voluminous robes over the shoulders, and, final touch, echoing the method in super-sensitive modelling of the hands.

Just what is the hidden rhythm, the order, that he puts into these simple or complex organizations, is the artist's secret, the unexplainable creative addition. The mechanists offer the explanation that certain mathematical arrangements, in terms of balanced weight, proportioned areas, and symmetrical juxtaposition of volumes, please the eye, and that El Greco cunningly hides these geometrical adjustments within his picture. The observers who grant a mystic insight and a more imaginative inventiveness to the artist speak of El Greco's work as echoing the not-to-be-explained melodies of the divine order. They see in these canvases a fixation of cosmic design—an extension of cosmic movement.



El Greco: *Christ in the Garden* [August L. Mayer: *Domenico Theotocopuli El Greco*]



The portraits, as a group, may serve as a point of departure from the study of El Greco's artistic means to an analysis of his success in handling his subject-matter as such. Does he, in building his picture for plastic strength and richness, sacrifice that fidelity which may fairly be considered a prime virtue of portraiture? He does not, rather can he be placed in the very first rank of portraitists—with Titian. The faces are alert and living, though they show the reserve of the aristocrat or ascetic.

El Greco distorted natural aspect, certainly. In general he narrowed the faces, elongated the foreheads, dwelt upon the flame-like lights of the head and refined the hands, too, until they become sensitized indicators of emotion and character. This applies especially to the imperious churchmen and the proud grandees who were his usual sitters, in elucidating the pride and fire and aspiration in the Spanish character, he showed himself a forerunner of modern psychological portraiture. The distortion, the departure from camera truth, is not only for rhythmic and sensuous effect, but for the truthful revelation of character.

That the method is equally employed in El Greco's long series of "invented portraits" of the apostles and saints is explainable on the same grounds. El Greco, in re-creating historic characters, took models insofar as they were necessary to complement his inner imaging, from the holy men around him. Spain was the scene of the intensest religious activity of the time, and Toledo the very centre of Christian ardour. There is a spiritual truth in this transmutation of character into forms that writhe like fire. There is a basis in material truth, too, for scientists have noted a small-headed long-limbed type of man as native to the Toledo region, though he is not, of course, nearly so attenuated as the artist's figures.

The picture generally considered El Greco's masterpiece is a panoramic painting in the Santo Tomé Church in Toledo, *The Funeral of Count Orgaz*. It is truest El Greco, yet it recalls the painter's apprenticeship to Titian and Tintoretto. Titian in the earthly scene of the lower half of the composition with its superb portraits, superbly related, and Tintoretto in the heavenly apparition above. Yet just as certainly neither Italian could have painted this mystically inspired picture. The conception is said to have come to El Greco in a flash, as a vision. Count Orgaz had founded the Church of Santo Tome in the fourteenth century. So great had been his piety that, when he died and was ready for burial, two saints came down from Heaven and gently lifted his body and placed it in the grave.



El Greco *St Paul* [Courtesy City Art Museum St Louis]

The lower half of the picture beautifully represents the event, with the church pageantry sufficiently woven into the central group, before the congregation of aristocratic mourners. In contrast with this scene which is devised with more of calm horizontal accent than is usual with El Greco, there is placed above, the representation of the reception of the soul of the deceased in Heaven, in a panoramic composition that is one of the most liquid, aspiring and audacious achievements in the whole range of the artist's work.

Undoubtedly the sober, stable, earthbound character of the scene below is purposely played against the melting joyous and exalted rhythms of the celestial scene above. Here are all El Greco's favourite distortions and intensifications: the lightning-flash lighting; the folding involutions of clouds and drapery; the elongated bodies; the fluctuating counterpoint of dark-light

answering a strong main rhythm. All this is manipulated to build up to the Christ figure enthroned, with Mary the Intercessor at one side and the naked soul at the other. Echoing hosts of angels are disposed with beautiful variety in the clouds around.

The celestial half of the picture is an utter negation of classic ideals and Italian methods. It reminds one of El Greco's Cretan origin. The disposition of elements harks back to the Byzantine in the strong, simple organization, in the dependence upon abstraction rather than verisimilitude, in the suppression of background. Similarly in El Greco's simplified and rhythmic portraits there is a hint of the forthrightness and abstraction of the Byzantine icons. To have gone back to the Byzantine, to icon and mosaic, in any idiomatic way, would have been retrogression. But El Greco seems instead to have restored to objective Western painting a strength and a profound rhythmic flow out of that earlier Oriental style. His work is as near to a fusion of Oriental and Occidental ideals and methods as anything in art history.

If the Greek sacrificed any major resource of Western painting it was perhaps in the field of colour. Like Titian, he is not content to add his colours objectively, rather he builds them in. El Greco, however, prefers a cool colour range, in contrast to Venetian glamour and warmth. A pale or dull green, cool blues, lemon-yellow or ochre, wine-red—these predominate though often kept secondary to browns and greys with touched-in light. Of course no one has shown that an artist *can* enrich his canvas with Titianesque fullness of colour—or, for that matter, with the sparkling transparent colourfulness of the Persians—and at the same time encompass those fluctuating and brilliant patterns of light and shade which here are sensuously so lovely, and emotionally so compelling.

Perhaps in the orchestration the partial muting of the one instrument was necessary to permit giving full play to the others. Not until the time of Cézanne will an attempt be made to achieve, in terms of colour, nuances of form-expression as rich and delicate as those in El Greco's canvases. Nor, until some twentieth-century master fuses the newly understood colour potentialities with the other elements, will anyone be able to record that the Spanish painter has been surpassed. Where painting touches upon the ecstatic and the supernal, he is master above all others.

The painters who take the centre of the stage in Spain after El Greco, except the visitor Rubens, are steeped in realism, sometimes of the frightful,



El Greco *St Dominic* Detail [Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

sometimes of the saccharine variety. Until the star of Velazquez rises there is only a secondary activity, though critics enough have listed Ribera among Spain's greatest masters.

Born in Valencia, Ribera made his way as a boy to Rome, all but starved on the streets there, went to Naples and studied with the violent realist, Caravaggio. He spent most of his life at the court of the Spanish viceroy in Naples, although he was well known in Madrid too. The Neapolitans called him *El Spagnoletto*, and occasional canvases are so labelled today.

Ribera's drama, unlike El Greco's, is of the most obvious, outward aspects of life—often drifting into melodrama—and his method is naturalistic. His one virtue is that he returned to nature and seldom pretended to more than a transcription of incidents that interested him among picturesque beggars, gutter boys, hermits, and the like, though he branched out into monumental religious art in his own factual way. He especially loved to paint martyrdoms



*Mater Dolorosa* Wood, 13th century [Courtesy Hispanic Society of America]

Leone's son Pompeyo carried on with competent lifelikeness. He was aided and abetted by other Italians, and shortly by native Spaniards educated in Rome and Florence. Of these Alonso Berruguete is most typical. There is an illuminating tribute to Berruguete by Bermudez (as translated by Pijoan): "He was the first Spanish teacher who disseminated in the kingdom the knowledge of correct drawing and the proper proportions of the human body, magnificence of form, expression and the other sublime attributes of sculpture and painting." No wonder the young Spaniards flocked to him for instruction!

Among a group of sculptors thus turned away from what had been a sound non-realistic Spanish tradition, Gasparo Becerra is notable as having retained, although a student of Vasari, a native independence. He initiated a fashion of polychrome sculpture peculiar to Spain. (The Italians, of course, had arrived at colourlessness because that was the state of the exhumed Roman statues.) Martinez Montañes is especially known for his polychrome religious statues, which are still reverently carried through the streets on days of processions. They are in keeping with the rich pageantry fostered by the Spanish Catholic fathers—although artistically far inferior to the Byzantine-influenced crucifixes known to their ancestors of some centuries earlier.

Through Montañes one comes to his pupil Cano, and in turn to Cano's pupil Pedro de Mena, who is at once so naturalistic and so sentimental that Spanish Renaissance sculpture may be marked then as arriving at the pitch of sweetness and feminine softness reached long since by the last della Robbias in Italy.

Most appreciated among Spanish-born artists is Velazquez (more fully Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velazquez), a coldly truthful painter and, at his best, one of the most exquisite and admirable of realists. He was exceptionally prolific: perhaps no other acclaimed master is so widely represented in the world's museums by canvases sometimes good, frequently mediocre, and occasionally downright bad. From the time when Francisco Pacheco, the artist who for six years had been his teacher in Seville, sent him to Madrid to seek favour at the court of Philip IV until his death nearly forty years later, he was successful, a favoured courtier and a renowned purveyor to the aristocracy.

The works he had done when he went up to Madrid at the age of twenty-three—he took a homely study of a water-carrier as sample—were competently naturalistic genre studies and religious pictures very much like imitations of Caravaggio and Ribera with the violence curbed. They caught the attention of the king's favourite, then of the king himself. From that moment Velazquez never lacked for patronage and honours. His own character, too, for he was upright, quiet-mannered, and faithful, if uninspired and overpliant, contributed to make his position secure, his career materially successful. He was not only the king's painter—there are forty portraits of Philip IV from his brush—but the king's familiar companion. Philip himself took to painting under his tutelage.

Velazquez's last painting before an Italian journey, which was to prove an epochal influence, was *The Topers*, an ultra-photographic, studio-posed familiar group, which has had an enormous vogue. It was Rubens, then a visitor at the court of Madrid, who insisted that the young man go to Italy to broaden his outlook and see the latest fashions. Leaving Madrid in 1629 he spent two years in the sometime haunts of Titian, Tintoretto, Raphael, Michelangelo, and Caravaggio. He also studied the disinterred classic statues. He was not the man to resist fashionable currents, and he seems to have studied Caravaggio and Rubens even too well, though in another direction there is Guido Reni's influence in his too smooth middle-period portraits. Fortunately, other pictures bear witness that he turned back to Titian.

An academic hardness is evident just after he returned from Italy to the court at Madrid. There follows a long period in which portraits claim his attention almost exclusively. He adds a certain dash and freshness to them. There is a moment in the sequence when he goes back to study El Greco. His one notable historical scene in paint shows the influence. It is the famous *Surrender of Breda*, which is full, animated—and Spanish.

The spirit of Spain otherwise enters hardly at all into Velazquez's way of painting. There is nothing of the fire, the pride, and the mysticism—which are said to be of the very essence of the national character—in his transcriptions of life around him. In the mature period of his art, indeed, there is hardly more than an objective record of people seen within the narrow confines of court life: transcriptions of its characters, costumes, and oddities.

What does signify in the history of art is that Velazquez refined the painting medium and the current realism to a new degree of clarity, reaching forward to a modern freshness and directness of colouring, and that his portraits afford a caressing pleasure to the eye. He knew compositional structure too, although in the surface, Raphaellesque sense, without ever once approaching the symphonic fullness and three-dimensional solidity of Titian and El Greco. His portrait heads and full-length figures sit nicely in their framed fields. But especially it is the delicate, controlled colouring, the atmospheric freshness—plus, of course, faithfulness to a model—that count.

Already in the time of the *Breda* picture, the painter was studying light effects and advancing beyond the technical formulas developed by his predecessors. There is steady progress thereafter toward a thinning of medium. The brushwork as such disappears. Colour creeps into the faces, with unprecedented delicacy in the nuances. The portrait becomes alive, subtly ap-



Velazquez *The Surrender of Breda* Prad

pealing, in a new way—foreshadowing, indeed, the sweet harmonies of Whistler and Manet. Because he advanced beyond Titian and El Greco in detecting varicoloured vibration in shadows, which were sull, in general, painted black, he has been called “the first impressionist.” But whereas the nineteenth-century leaders of impressionism were to develop a method of painting in “pure colour,” without a marked structure of dark-light, thus achieving a brilliant vibrancy unknown before, Velazquez developed his colour-harmonies within a scheme almost sombrely dark. His virtue is in a freshness and transparency of colour veiled in harmonies of grey and silver and pearl.

In general his portraits are outwardly concerned, objective. He presents his subjects without analysis or commentary. But on rare occasions he did get



down to psychological reality, even criticism. During a second sojourn of two years in Italy, 1649-1651, when he had been internationally recognized as a leading portraitist, Pope Innocent X insisted upon sitting to him. When the artist had finished a preliminary oil sketch, revealing the shrewd, hard character beneath the outward visage, His Holiness winced, and then exclaimed: "Too true!"

As so often happens when an artist is obsessed with the idea of verisimilitude, the two extant sketch paintings of Innocent X are superior to the finished and elaborated version. The head in the Mellon Collection at Washington and the head-and-shoulders sketch in the Gardner Museum at Boston come near to being in the first rank of portraits. The completed painting, in the Doria Palace, Rome, suffers from the meticulously exact treatment of chairback, hands, paper, and lacy apron. The unity and concentration are there wellnigh ruined. The two sketches are examples of selective realism near its best. The other is realism degraded in the direction of naturalism.

Unfortunately it was naturalism that most often controlled the artist's hand when he painted his lately celebrated gallery of characters at King Philip's court: particularly the buffoons and dwarfs, the hoop-skirted ladies, and the armoured gentlemen.

In the end it is best to return to the simplest heads, or to bits in the larger canvases, noting the fresh-air aspect and the flower-like colouring, the sometimes exquisite arrangement and the felicitous smoothness. Ultimately, indeed, the joy to be had in Velazquez will assuredly be found in the "slighter" pictures, with their silvery and greyed tonal effects and their exquisite adjustment of parts.

Very famous, however, is the so-called *Rokeby Venus* in the National Gallery, London, the only female nude known to have been executed in Spain up to this time. The picture was painted after Velazquez's second Italian visit, and obviously under the influence of the Giorgione-Titian school. It fails by a very great deal to match the works of the Venetian masters—although no one can fail to see that the young lady as such has excellent points. In this late period of his life, too, Velazquez returned to religious story-pictures, not very happily. They seem derivative, and lack strength.

Originality, indeed, had never been this artist's forte. Aside from the development of that one individual virtue, his fresh-coloured, pearly manner of painting, Velazquez did little to rank him above the average successful court painter. For a time, in recent generations, other painters were inclined



*Velázquez The Surrender of Breda: Prado*

pealing in a new way—foreshadowing indeed the sweet harmonies of Whistler and Manet. Because he advanced beyond Titian and El Greco in detecting varicoloured vibration in shadows which were still in general painted black, he has been called 'the first impressionist'. But whereas the nineteenth-century leaders of impressionism were to develop a method of painting in 'pure colour' without a marked structure of dark-light, thus achieving a brilliant vibrancy unknown before Velázquez developed his colour-harmonies within a scheme almost sombrely dark. His virtue is in a freshness and transparency of colour veiled in harmonies of grey and silver and pearl.

In general his portraits are outwardly conceived, objective. He presents his subjects without analysis or commentary. But on rare occasions he did get

down to psychological reality, even criticism. During a second sojourn of two years in Italy, 1649-1651, when he had been internationally recognized as a leading portraitist, Pope Innocent X insisted upon sitting to him. When the artist had finished a preliminary oil sketch, revealing the shrewd, hard character beneath the outward visage, His Holiness winced, and then exclaimed "Too true!"

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to find a "faultless purity" in his method. But it was a thing of method rather than substance.

Velazquez seems to have been forgotten by the world within a quarter-century after his death in 1660, and his fame slept until well into the nineteenth century. Then the proponents of impressionism rediscovered his innovations, and a generation avid for realism in all its forms raised him to a place beside Raphael and Vermeer, among the foremost popular masters. Now again fewer pilgrims are to be found at his shrine. He is today accounted high in the second range of masters.

If Velazquez suffered eclipse, his contemporary Murillo, also a Sevillian and younger by a few years, had better luck, until the twentieth century. Enormously popular during his lifetime, he held his own during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He specialized in two types of art precious to the sentimental-minded: sweetened versions of religious story-painting, faultlessly natural, and photographic genre studies of gutter life.

The religious canvases are likely to be laid out in the tradition of the grand manner, but the Madonnas are local girls—very sweet and appealing too, though given overmuch to rolling their eyes heavenward—and the cupids are chubby, perky babes out of the home cradles. In the later periods the *Immaculate Conceptions*, of which there are twenty, exhibit the figures floating in vaporous mists, in what used to be considered a poetic vagueness.

The gutter studies are done with a purpose quite opposite to that of the slum realists of Naples. Although the children are obviously gamins, they are miraculously washed and pretty. Although the method is naturalistic, with every grape and toenail separately and completely limned, all that is unpleasant in the background is omitted. Life for Murillo, whether that of the Madonnas and angels or of the town orphans, was something to be sweetened by paint. No other romantic ever put into canvases so many girls and babies and cupids, so many lambs and doves.

Today the bubble of Murillo's fame has burst. It is seen that the figures are posed, that the subjects are sentimentalized, the "masterly" painting is recognized as surface craftsmanship, of an academic order. No other painter so long praised as immortal has fallen into eclipse with such rapidity. One hears oftenest now the adjectives "insipid" and "superficial." At least two histories of European art have appeared without picturing his works, and one fails even to mention him. His two-hundred-year reign as an accepted master is,



Velazquez *Pope Innocent X* [Courtesy Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston]

however, in itself a phenomenon not a little illuminating as also the places of honour still given his canvases in not altogether provincial museums. He lacks, more than any other recently revered artist, the plastic strength and the imaginative content by which the modern observer judges visual art.

For the rest there was, in seventeenth-century Spain Velazquez's son-in-law and helper, Juan Bautista del Mazo who was next in line as court painter a competent but uninspired portraitist and one of the earliest Spanish landscape-painters. His name has been the more bandied about by critics because he made copies of many of Velazquez's pictures so that great difficulty has arisen over which canvases are from the master's hand which from the clever copyists (and which, perchance, are to be attributed to both).

The next court painter Juan Carreño de Miranda has more claim to mention for his own work. But already Spanish painting is comparatively lifeless and is certainly unoriginal. When the Bourbon kings displace the Habsburgs in 1700 imported artists will take the court position and well into the eighteenth century there will be no notable painting. Goya is to blaze across the Spanish sky before the century is done—but he belongs to a later era a foreign tradition.

## CHAPTER XXI

### *Flemish Art and the Spread of Realism*

IT WAS Michelangelo, a very great artist but little known as a critic, who gave expression to this illuminating estimate of Flemish art

The paintings of Flanders please any pious person more than the paintings of Italy—not because Flemish art is effective or excellent, but because of the capacities of good people. It seems beautiful to women, especially to the very old and very young ones—as also to monks and nuns—and to a few persons of quality who are blind to rhythmic values. It is an anecdotal and sentimental art, which aims only at success and obtains it easily, not by values of painting but by the subject-matter. The painters select things that gladden one—particularly saints and pious figures, for which tears are always ready.

In Flanders, too, they paint to deceive the external eye. They delight in showing actual stuffs—bricks and ruins and rags and grasses, and the shadowed fields with trees, rivers and bridges—these they call landscapes—with a great many figures here and there. All this is very popular—the least artistic intelligence can find therein something that appeals to it. An interest in facts, and two eyes alone are necessary. But, although some people delight in it—in truth it is done without reason or art, it lacks rhythm or proportion, it shows no care in selecting or rejecting, it is innocent of artistic body and vitality.

I do not consider all Flemish painting bad—in some other places it is far worse—but it tries to do too many things at once, each of which if attempted alone would suffice for a great work—so that it fails to do anything really well.

This opinion, we are told, was expressed in Rome, at a discussion held in the year 1538 or 1539, and Michelangelo's lovely Platonic friend, Vittoria Colonna, 'undertook the defence of the religious and consolatory art of the North.' That is fitting, too, for the great sculptor-painter had once said that oil painting was a less virile art, good only for women and sluggards. What is useful today—in the absence of Vittoria Colonna's rebuttal—is to note how infallibly Michelangelo put his finger upon every weakness of Flemish art.

Allowing for Michelangelo's stormy nature and his overpowering conviction as a creative artist, remembering that his own genius was for those very qualities that the Northern painters lacked, grandeur, plastic aliveness, and symphonic fullness, granting therefore that he may have overlooked a certain virtue that lies in doing smaller things surpassingly well, one may accept his criticism of Flemish art as extraordinarily penetrating—as the best, if negatory, introduction to it.

For the truth is that the widely celebrated paintings of the van Eycks, van der Weyden, and Memling are small, external, and only minutely realistic. The early Flemish painters were so interested in doing a little thing well that they entirely overlooked some of the big things that go to make up supremely effective art. Their aim is to deceive the external eye, their subjects are chosen to please easily, they do put in so many little things, and so fail to choose any for emphasis, that interest often wastes away in a sea of perfections. But they are geniuses in their chosen miniature mode.

If it be womanish to delight in these delicate and transcriptive things—and, one notes, it is seldom men who gaze through the magnifying-glasses commonly placed beside the van Eyck canvases in art museums—then let us remember that there are women enough among museum-goers. Nor has any one, despite the lesser place commanded by realism in recent art appreciation, established the point at which devotion to realism makes painting negligible.

Realism is the established European art-type from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Flemish art affords material for an early and a determining chapter in the record of this type. It is to be remembered, in taking up the painting of the van Eycks, that one is returning to the year 1400, when in Italy only the sculptors had cultivated the camera eye. Although the painters of the South will take a full century thereafter to perfect "the new vision" (Masaccio's dates are 1401-1428, Leonardo's 1452-1519), the van Eycks seem to leap forward to the most meticulous documentary illustration during the actual afternoon of Gothic practice, at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

It is to Gothic practice that one turns to detect the promise and the beginnings of this triumph of the natural. There are roots in two arts, illumination and sculpture. The miniatures of the thirteenth century, in general hold to their formalism, as inherited from Byzantine iconography and abstraction. They are on the side of decoration, symbolism, and convention. But in the fourteenth century, pictorialism and naturalism had crept in.

Just as throughout late Gothic art, despite the elongation of forms and the





Miniatures in the *Turin Book of Hours*  
Ascribed to Hubert van Eyck

strict stylization of the whole, an objective interest had entered, based perhaps upon a newly awakened delight in the works of nature, so this particular graphic art began to see, in the fourteenth century, geometrical lines branching and bursting into leaf, and latticed fields splitting to admit here a bird, there a mermaid—often unrelated to anything in the text. As these fanciful but “real” innovations became commoner, the old sense of the miniature as decoration progressively disappeared. The idea of space-filling as a fundamentally plastic art weakened, the idea of faithful illustration advanced

A hundred illuminated texts might be brought into exhibition, showing every step from abstract and conventionalized design to naturalistic, detailed illustration. But two masterpieces will serve as well at the moment: the one, an English psalter of the fourteenth century, instancing the decorative mode elaborated and embellished with natural figures, flowers, and birds (see page 409), the other a page from the *Turin Book of Hours*, wherein illumination has become illustration—at the hand of Hubert van Eyck probably.

Sculpture—which in Italy, it will be remembered, in the innovations of Ghiberti and Donatello, had anticipated the Masaccian advance by a century—had in France also turned natural to a measurable extent. In Burgundy the late Gothic carvers had eased out of their art the medieval "distortion" in favour of rational statement. The Low Countries were in 1400 a part of the Burgundian domain, and intercourse between Dijon and Bruges was close and frequent.

From the rudimentary Flemish frescoes and panel-painting of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there was evidently little influence, but the opportunity to push realism to a new exactitude did come from development within the art, from technical advances. For some generations experiments had been made with oil as a colour-base, as against the stiffer and more sticky tempera. The van Eycks—long reported to have invented oil painting, but now known to have picked up a medium occasionally used by earlier painters—perfected the method and were the first to utilize it in the service of the new vision, to which its fluidity and smoothness particularly suited it.

Their own effects, so jewel-like, may have been influenced by the enamels so popular in medieval Europe. The hard brilliant finish and, in the portraits specially, a lingering flatness of composition, would suggest some vague affinity. Nevertheless, of all the influences cited to account for the comparatively sudden emergence of the early fifteenth-century oil painting oflanders, one must go back to illumination as standing first. A glance through any collection of fifteenth-century panel-paintings suffices to emphasize the kinship to the advanced miniatures of the books of hours, psalters, and mustahs of the preceding hundred years. Indeed, the virtues of illumination—now become illustration—are exactly those of independent painting: minute decoration and colourful picturing, documentation exhaustively detailed, and homely characterization. It is not until the time of Bosch and Brueghel that these values, essentially those of a small art enlarged by artists still small-minded, are notably transcended.



Dirk Bouts: *Madonna and Child*. Collection Jules S. Bache, New York  
[Photo, courtesy Duveen Brothers]

Flanders, for the purposes of art history, is that part of the Low Countries today embraced in Belgium. The Dutch, differentiated in later records as belonging to Holland, the present Netherlands, richly contributed to the Flemish flowering of art, before their own cities supported schools and studios. Of the fifteenth-century group of "Flemish masters," Dirk Bouts and Gerard David and Petrus Christus were born Dutchmen. They naturally went to Bruges, as the art capital of all the Low Countries, for schooling and apprenticeship first, and then for a market.

Bruges was a rich and progressive city, one of the great seaports of the world, a centre of commercial intercourse, and a scene of pageantry and colourful ceremony. Flanders boasted other prospering cities, Louvain, Ypres, Brussels, and Ghent. A little later, Antwerp will rise, as Bruges declines. All these communities knew the glories of Gothic art. They had long since been recognized as manufacturers of the most popular tapestries of the Western world.

Here democracy (of a plutocratic sort) is more advanced than in the war-torn Latin countries. The third estate already is strong, there is a burning civic pride, and on holidays a large number of burghers are swelling about in the velvets and laces once reserved to nobles of the royal courts and to church dignitaries. In short, there is a bourgeois aristocracy—and it is ready for art.

It happens that the Low Countries belong to the Dukes of Burgundy. In late Romanesque days and in Gothic, the Burgundians had been noteworthy artists, we have already seen them as far afield as Spain. The court is art-conscious, and there is an interchange between Bruges and Dijon. Matching this royal example at the top, there is at the bottom a guild system that works not only to stabilize conditions (and profits) for the artists but to insist upon honest materials—lasting colours, for instance—and to assure the soundest craftsmanship, based on a normal seven-years' apprenticeship. In short, art is a worker-controlled industry within a prosperous community numbering both royal and rich burgher patrons.

The Renaissance is, of course, in the self-sufficient Flanders of the fifteenth century, nothing more than a rumour from the South. There are no classical ruins to be dug up, hence no confusing cross-currents of theory, demanding Greek harmony or Roman lifelikeness. Nor has the scientific passion been awakened in the workaday Flemish breast. The realism here is Gothic, child-like, external. The painting grows direct out of Flemish and Burgundian

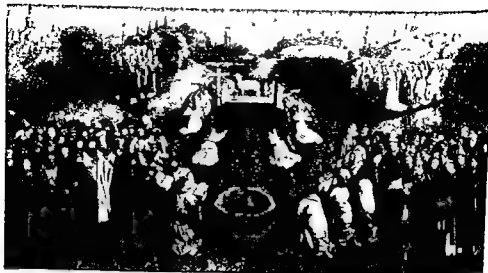
illustration, in a way shaped by the forthright character of the Nordic citizenry

Here, then, are neither the sweet melodies of the Siennese, nor the symphonic grandeurs of the Venetians. Michelangelo, who had said that "Painting is the music of God, the outpouring of His radiant perfection," found Flemish painting empty of everything that makes art transcendent. It is not that the Flemings neglect the religious themes: their most ambitious works are altarpieces and reliquary panels and church paintings. But they fill them with *Hausfrauen* and Low Country burghers and peasants in their Sunday clothes, and trees, flowers, grasses, dogs, carpets, furniture, and buildings, all so meticulously portrayed that there is no room for the larger conceptions and aspirations. We may well believe that their eyes were directed downward as they shaped their *Adorations* or *Crucifixions*, that their interest really was in those accessories which they depict so minutely, in the texture of hair and velvet and armour, in the hang and lay of drapery, in the leaves of the tree, the swelling hills, the distant towers—which together 'they call landscapes'."

All emphasis is on what is seen with the intent outward eye, and on the precision with which that can be recorded. It is the commonplace discovered and glorified with competency by artists with good consciences and good digestions. It is the earthy made to seem fresh because observed with a new and clear-eyed accuracy and presented with unparalleled delicacy. If it is petty, at least it has the virtue of the homely and familiar. One is disarmed by the very cleanness, immediacy, and unpretentiousness of it.

If Italian art had not slipped so soon into grandiosity and futile academism, one would say confidently that the Italian was incomparably the better way. But at least these Northern painters did not go into art in the self-conscious manner that is proclaimed by most of the second-rate reborn Italians, that led to a sterile rhetoric. The Flemings observed honestly, their intention was small, in small and honest effects they surpass all others.

It is not only the emphasis on objective detail that announces the littleness of their intention and interests, that, too, but with it there is a neglect of larger coherence. For while a wrinkled face and a work-worn hand will both be depicted with consummate documentation, there will be no reality in the relationship between them. The face will be essentially a face and not part of a three-dimensional head. And if, rarely, the Flemings attempt a nude, it is—well, terrible. It is an added together record of the variously observed



Hubert van Eyck: *Adoration of the Lamb* St. Bavon Church, Ghent  
 [Photo, courtesy Antwerp Museum]

parts of some local man or woman, usually overfed or broken down, without sense of a dignity of the whole, without a rhythmic beauty of the body that artists elsewhere have recognized and sometimes immortalized. (The very celebrated St. Bavon altarpiece at Ghent was known in its own time not by its right name, *The Adoration of the Lamb*, but as the "Adam and Eve altar," by reason of the unusualness of the two naked figures, depicted in side panels, and the sensation they caused.)

Beyond this objective shortcoming there is that of method and plastic manipulation. The painters *build* their pictures small-mindedly. They do not know how to compose in the large. The central panel of the St. Bavon altarpiece, by Hubert van Eyck—which has other virtues—is laid out with only the most elementary symmetry, and it is plastically negative: without focus, with no main motive, with no indicated track for the eye. There is nothing in the composition to draw attention to the whole before the parts become apparent and are counted over. Either the bits are equally played up or the emphasis is by chance. It is because of this lack of rhythmic generalization, of plastic organization, that the small pictures, portraits particularly, are likely

to please us more than the ambitious religious paintings—excepting those among us who especially value minutely documentary and complexly photographic rendering.

It is noteworthy that although this is realism, of the extreme sort sometimes termed naturalism, it differs in both conception and method from the slowly emerging realism of the Renaissance Italians. The Flemings advance by copying what they see, with a marvellous fidelity and with meticulous craftsmanship. In Italy, instead, it is the intellect that is awakened, more than the natural eye. Masaccio and Pollaiuolo and Leonardo are off on a search for *laws* of representation; and science is worshipped, particularly in the name of anatomy and perspective. One does not hear of the Flemish artists dissecting cadavers. Their knowledge is objective, their art compounded of many seen things added together.

There is something uncritical, trusting, and childlike about Flemish realism, and one does well to approach it, for enjoyment, in that spirit or not at all. If one is going to retain memories of the organ tones of Michelangelo or Tintoretto or El Greco, or the melodic and spiritual inspiration of Duccio and Fra Angelico, the paler virtues of these homely panels will dissipate. But granted the many-sidedness of art, and of the enjoyment it affords, any one can find a pleasure, a mild one, in the faithful patience, the impeccable miniature craftsmanship, and the diverting characterizations.

At its best, say in Jan van Eyck's *Our Lady and Child* or van der Weyden's *Portrait of a Lady* or Petrus Christus's *Monk*, this art is characterized by an appealing fragile loveliness. Once, in his picture of *The Marys at the Sepulchre*, Hubert van Eyck transcended the limitations of his school and produced a complex picture with adequate relationship of large and small, with organizational strength added to a rich array of minor facts. And in a final phase, when realism is no longer self-consciously insistent, a genius, Brueghel, will enlarge the Flemish idiom and paint local pictures with universal sweep and organizational power.

The very little known about Hubert van Eyck affords scant light on the reasons for his artistic eminence, and tells nothing of the sources of his inspiration and artistry. He was born about 1365, it is thought, in a remote village beyond the Dutch border, named Maaseyck, whence his name. He probably received training at a studio in near-by Maastricht. He seems to have moved early to Ghent, and there he died in 1426.

Jan van Eyck was, supposedly, twenty years younger. It is known definitely that he moved from Bruges to Lille in 1425 by order of Philip III Duke of Burgundy, he was then "*varlet de chambre et peintre de mon d. le seigneur*" And of Jan there are numerous records, many in regard to payments from the duke, sometimes for his work as painter, at others for secret or open missions to foreign countries (It will be remembered that he introduced Flemish ideals and methods into Spain in 1429.) There are notations also of payments from the municipality of Bruges for painting and gilding statues and tabernacles on the front of the City Hall, and an entry concerning completion in 1432 of the polyptych of *The Adoration of the Lamb*, upon which Hubert had been engaged at the time of his death six years earlier. Jan died in 1441, an honoured and widely known artist.

The paintings left by the brothers afford the more eloquent record. They testify that the two artists leaped forward, at a time when painting around them was still "primitive" and conventional, to camera-eye naturalness. They partook of a new curiosity about nature and they perfected a means of expression flawless and superficially brilliant. In the foreground of Hubert's *The Marys at the Sepulchre* the various little flowers can be recognized by the botanist as nettle and iris, mullein and teasel, so exact is the rendering, and every bit of cloth, embroidery, metal helmet, or marble surface is perfectly characterized as to texture and "feel." No less distinctly detailed (though historically a poor guess) is the city of Jerusalem in the distance. There is even a flight of geese across the cloud-flecked sky.

One remembers, too, that in the picture there is a Roman soldier asleep against the front of the tomb. That he is studied directly from a local peasant is obvious, but the greater significance is in the fact that he is thoroughly individualized. At this time in Italy the faces in Masaccio's pictures still are type studies. They have begun to show appropriate emotion but all are variations of one model or of a generalized conception of Man. It will be Filippo Lippi's characters two or three decades later, that cause a stir because they are "like the Prior's niece" or suggest the breathless fellow "fresh from his murder," or "folks at church." But here already, in the North the van Eycks have come to this familiar characterization far more true to the exact surface individualization of it than Fra Lippo will ever be, and they add botanical and geological and sartorial exhibits equally exact in characterization, to the human.

*The Marys at the Sepulchre* is now generally ascribed to Hubert rather than





Roger van der Weyden: *Deposition*. Escorial

to Jan, for reasons more important to the experts than to the casual student. If the ascription is right, Hubert is the superior artist, for seldom else does an early Flemish painter so well contrive the structure of an ambitious picture. The relationship of figures, the concentration of interest, the transition from foreground group to background elements—all this is managed with mastery hardly hinted at in most of the complex panels of the era. The background, moreover, is an advance upon anything in the art of painting in Europe up to this time: there is nowhere, so early, a landscape so detailed and in itself so handsome.

It is, of course, from the miniature that Hubert van Eyck had learned most in his progress toward this significant achievement. There actually are books illuminated by his hand, most notably the *Turin Book of Hours*, with landscapes showing decided affinity to the background of the large picture.

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Jan van Eyck: *Portrait of the Artist's Wife* [Courtesy Communal Museum, Bruges]

Both Flemish and French miniatures of the time are bound up with the advance in "free" painting.

Of other paintings ascribed to Hubert the most celebrated are the centre panel of the St. Bavon altarpiece, known as *The Adoration of the Lamb*; and two panels depicting *The Crucifixion* and *The Last Judgment* now in the Metropolitan Museum of New York. All three are typical in their minute naturalism and their microscopic dexterity; typically lacking, too, in plastic mastery. An illuminating note in the Metropolitan Museum catalogue indicates how revolutionary was the advance Hubert van Eyck had made from the old symbolic-formalistic painting: "The Crucifixion is conceived as an execution, with the brutal or curious or idle onlookers which such a spectacle would attract. The Mother of God is a poor, broken old woman whose son



Robert Campin *The Annunciation* [Courtesy Brussels Museum]

has been put to death before her eyes. There are countless figures in the picture and each is a real person actuated by his particular feelings and circumstances."

Jan van Eyck depicts the wrinkles of an old face or the threads of an embroidered edging even more painstakingly, if that is possible, than Hubert. He is more than likely, however, to let a bit of patiently and lovingly worked out detail draw attention from those parts on which the eye might better be focused. In *The Virgin and the Chancellor Ruben*, one of his richest paintings, the floor detail in the foreground, the windows at the sides, and the elaborate

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

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vista at the back, all succeed in pulling away the gaze that earlier or later painters want concentrated upon the middle-ground figures. It is a picture full of a great number of things extraordinarily well painted, but its very virtues disperse its compositional unity. It is rather in his portraits that Jan van Eyck is happiest. There is, however, in a private collection at Liverpool, a somewhat damaged *Our Lady and Child* which seems exceptionally beautiful in arrangement as well as detail.

Robert Campin is sometimes bracketed with the van Eycks, his contemporaries, as an initiator of Flemish realism. He lacked nothing of their characteristic minuteness of depiction, he is also a victim of his own sharply drawn minor detail, and there is a suggestion of woodenness in most of the works ascribed to him. He is sometimes identified as 'The Master of Flemalle,' or again as "The Master of Merode," and there is considerable doubt about the attributed pictures. It is not he but his pupil Roger van der Weyden who introduces a fresh note.

The *Portrait of a Lady* in the Mellon collection marks a distinctive achievement within Flemish painstaking portraiture. Here is masterly planning of the larger areas in relation to the frame. There is a generalized harmony and a sweet linear grace. While there are not many things in van der Weyden's work, or in surviving Flemish painting, that approach the felicitous harmony of this portrait, the quality is implicit if less marked in a number of the artist's other compositions: notably *The Madonna and Child* in the Huntington collection, and the *Portrait of Philip the Good* in the Antwerp Museum. Even in a larger religious composition, the *Crucifixion* in the Johnson collection, one finds the same fresh crispness and rhythmic grace. One notes too that the background is washed clean of all those supplementary details so much insisted upon by Jan van Eyck.

Van der Weyden's advance is graphically illustrated in two versions of *The Deposition from the Cross*. The later one, in the Brussels Museum, is simplified, rendered coherent, and—as a painter would say, generally pulled together, as compared with an early, more detailed rendering. It is instructive to note how the background vistas—so beloved by most Flemish painters of the time, and so destructive of the formal structure, of focus—are suppressed, how the minutiae of the costumes are veiled, to what extent detail disappears. It is an object lesson in the way of a master who picks up the valuable knowledge uncovered by his associates, but integrates it to his own vision and selects from it to his own ends.



Rogier van der Weyden *Madonna and Child*  
[Courtesy Huntington Art Gallery, San Marino, California]



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Roger van der Weyden: *Deposition from the Cross* [Courtesy Brussels Museum]

A new way of art has been born with the van Eycks and is thus beautifully enlarged and refined within a quarter-century by van der Weyden. The half-dozen painters who are their contemporaries or followers repeat, in general, their achievements, sometimes slavishly, occasionally with distinctive variations. There is in Flanders an unusual tradition of what Sir Martin Conway terms "systematic borrowing." Dirk Bouts fails to suppress detail—is too often a victim of the current naturalism—and his figures are likely to be angular or attitudinized, but the gallery-goer now and again stumbles upon a bit of painting of his that greatly rewards close study.

Petrus Christus in his larger pictures is likely to lose his protagonists among accessories; but there are portraits from his hand which have simple grace and a smooth elegance. He is more than usually, too, a builder of inner pictorial structure. It has been suggested that both van der Weyden and Petrus Christus gained, in this matter of compositional solidity, by contacts with Italian painting. Certainly some broadening influence has entered by the time of Hugo van der Goes, a generation later. But it is his contemporary



Roger van der Weyden *Portrait of a Lady*  
Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D C



Hans Memling *Legend of St Ursula: Arrival at Basle*. Reliquary painting  
*Hospital of St John, Bruges* [Courtesy Communal Museum, Bruges]

Hans Memling who does most to reconcile the ideals and methods of the two schools. He is the foremost Flemish artist of the second half of the fifteenth century.

Memling, who may have been a German by birth, and perhaps also by training, lacks nothing of the Flemish microscopic fidelity, but he fixes one set of details to another with a fresh suavity. He softens the whole surface of his canvas with a sort of pervading hazy light, and his feeling for broader compositional values is distinctly Italianate. Nevertheless he remains primarily a Northern illustrator. There is a special serenity and a tenderness in





Hans Memling *Legend of St Ursula Arrival at Cologne* Reliquary painting  
*Hospital of St John, Bruges* [Courtesy Communal Museum, Bruges]

his religious pictures—as in the *Annunciation* in the Lehman collection.

Favourite among his works is the series of six reliquary panels illustrating the life of St Ursula, at the Hospital of St. John in Bruges, given, legend says, by the artist because the nuns had nursed him back to health after he had crept to the hospital doors as a wounded soldier. The panels adorn a casket. The artist has rendered them as illustrations that might as gracefully adorn the pages of a contemporary manuscript of the *Lives of the Saints*. The ships, the castles and cathedrals and city gates (those of Cologne and Basle), and the Virgins and welcoming committees are portrayed with a fine balance of



Petrus Christus. *Diptych as the Carthusian*. Collection of J. les S. Bache, New York  
[Photo courtesy Duveen Brothers]

realistic truth and compositional effectiveness. They are superb simply as illustrations.

The first cycle of Flemish painting closes with Gerard David, a follower of Memling who brought Dutch seriousness and placidity to his religious picturing. Bruges has now declined as a commercial centre, and artists are congregating in other cities. There is, however, a definite continuity of spirit and method from the van Eycks through van der Weyden and Memling to this last artist of the line. The *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* in the National Gallery, London, or the *Judgment of Cambyses* at Bruges, will indicate how closely David adhered to the original minutely naturalistic method, how close is the spirit of his art to that of the fourteenth-century illuminators.

Antwerp succeeds Bruges as the centre of Flemish art endeavour, and when there is a rebirth in the sixteenth century, the typical Flemish realism has been further modified by Italian influences. The actual materials, as seen in architectural backgrounds, have been up to this time Gothic (as have been also the decorative picture-frames, with traceries that often encroached upon the picture field), but now the round arch and the classic moulding creep in. There is a corresponding change in the conception of the picture—as examples by Quentin Matsys and Mabuse (otherwise Jan Gossaert) instantly testify, or others by Joos van Cleve and Adrian Isenbrandt.

As so often when national traditions are crossed, the result is in general destructive of conviction and distinction. And paintings enough from Matsys's hand, marked by the traditional Flemish accuracy and homely truth, seem only to dissipate those qualities in a pseudo-Italian grandeur. But an occasional portrait like the *Old Man*, too impeccably craftsmanlike to be Italian, too strong and vital to be directly derived from fifteenth-century Flemish tradition, proves Matsys's mastery when he is not too receptive to the alien currents of fashion. More Italian is the *Mary Magdalen* of the Antwerp Museum, or the *Laying in the Tomb* of the same gallery. His larger compositions fail to reconcile the old minuteness with the new and ampler intention. He seems, from their evidence, to have got from the South an alien formula rather than an applicable inspiration.

Mabuse likewise adopted a great deal of Italian manner without understanding the true Renaissance spirit, and his Southern sojourn, in the train of Duke Philip of Burgundy, failed to bring warmth to his rather cold draughtsmanship and frozen composition—perhaps because he studied especially the



Portrait by an unknown Flemish or Dutch painter Detail  
 [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

works of Leonardo da Vinci. He muffed the nudes, too, when he attempted them in the Italian fashion. It is necessary to go to his simple and sympathetic portraits to find undisturbed and distinctive enjoyment. *The Self-Portrait* at Liege is one of the best. In historical accounts he commands a place larger than that justified by his surviving works, because he is a pivotal figure, symbolic of a change creeping over Northern art.

Lovers of landscape-painting—of, say, Constable, Turner, Corot, and Cézanne—are sometimes surprised to learn that the genre hardly existed before the seventeenth century (except, of course, in the far Orient, then unknown to the West). The first great school of landscapists is the Dutch,



Joachim Patinir *Rest on the Flight to Egypt*  
 [Courtesy John G. Johnson Art Collection, Philadelphia]

but incidentally the Flemings and Germans did most to establish the form. In particular Joachim Patinir, a contemporary of Matsys and Mabuse, and like them a member of the Antwerp school, detached, as it were, the topographical composition from the cluttering figure-groups, and glorified landscape on its own account.

It will be remembered what a long step Hubert van Eyck had taken, in *The Marys at the Sepulchre* and in his miniatures, that he had already given dignity and lifelikeness to the open-air backgrounds. Throughout the following century the landscape vista or backdrop holds its place in Flemish painting, at the same time it is more slowly creeping into Italian, Spanish, and German painting. But Patinir's are the earliest "natural scenes" commonly accounted masterly and widely treasured on gallery walls. They have a distinctive clear colouring and a luminous atmosphere—and altogether a charm that has brought them a very special following of connoisseurs in recent years.

In some of Patinir's landscapes there is a fanciful treatment of cliffs and



Jerome Bosch: *The Garden of Eden*. Art Institute, Chicago

[Photo, courtesy J. B. Neumann]

in parts, than the best of Bosch's. They have, besides, sensitive finish, even a seductive fluency.

In some of his canvases there is a nightmare of confusion; also a great many creatures of an unnatural and invented sort known seldom outside the troubled realms of dream. But nothing could be more sober and reposeful than certain of the religious illustrations. Yet again a serious *Adoration* or a *Christ Carrying the Cross* will be peopled, off at the sides, with humorous rustics; or attention will be taken from the protagonists by the argument of two minor characters, satirically treated. Bosch's paintings were enormously popular not only at home but as far away as Madrid and Lisbon. Subsequently he was forgotten, and one may read a good half of the art histories on library shelves and not encounter his name.

If Bosch ran off into hallucinations and artistic disorder at times, a greater master came, with a similar genius for pictorial organization, and took something of the satire, the sly or lusty humour, and the fancy, without the gro-



Peter Brueghel *A Dark Day* [Courtesy Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna]

tesqueness and the diableries Peter Brueghel He was born about 1525, and like Bosch was a Hollander He spent most of his working life in Antwerp and Brussels Like the truest Flemings he was first of all a painter of the time and for the people They liked seeing themselves portrayed, gaucheries, foibles and all, and they enjoyed his wit and his homely moralizing But kings and courtiers appreciated his canvases too Rudolph II became so enamoured of them that he offered the weight of any of the artist's pictures in gold The Vienna Museum therefore has fifteen of them to this day

Truly Flemish too is Brueghel's bent for story-telling in pictures, with a great deal of minute detail In other words he is an illustrator But it is illustration with a difference For he is a visual constructor of surpassing imagination and skill He transforms his anecdotal, literary, and documentary materials into superb pictorial orchestrations So much was added, indeed that Abraham Ortelius was led to remark "Brueghel painted many things that the painters cannot paint



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Jerome Bosch *The Mocking of Christ* Detail  
 [Courtesy John G. Johnson Art Collection, Philadelphia]

trees, of rivers and figures, which seems out of keeping with the sober Flemish tradition. It may be that Patinir got it from Jerome Bosch, a slightly older painter, or perhaps the debt was the other way round. In any case Bosch is the most unaccountable figure in the history of the Low Countries. He mixes the local realism with fantasy and invention, the sacred with the obscene, the accurately truthful portrait with the caricature, a primitive



Jerome Bosch *The Prodigal Son* [Courtesy Boymans Museum Rotterdam]

"distortion" with amazingly sensitive exactitude, the amusing with the sublime. Until recently he has been numbered foremost among the wilful bad boys of art, and generally dismissed by authorities with a line—"too bad he wasn't serious." Perhaps his greatest claim upon our attention lies in his mastery of formal organization—which has been a thing neglected, in its larger implications, throughout the history of Flemish art. Suddenly, in this one artist's work, there is a return of depth and design, of solid structure and weighted order. Few paintings are more compact, more securely interrelated



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Peter Brueghel *The Hired Shepherd*

[Courtesy John G. Johnson Art Collection, Philadelphia]

purely æsthetic values has been adequate, the observer's faculties will have leaped to intuitive pleasure in the sheer plastic values of the picture, for seldom are abstract elements of volume and plane, chiaroscuro and texture, more cunningly adjusted for visual rhythm and melodious movement

Let the student of pictorial structure study well the compositional function of each of the three trees, as linear elements and as accenting three successive planes in recession (not missing the fact that each vertical has its corresponding horizontal line across the canvas at its base), the way in which a diagonal line intersects the horizontal at the foot of the far tree, the corresponding diagonal formed by the bird on the branch the wolf, and the shepherd's staff, reinforced by the darkened furrow, and finally the weight relationship between the figure and the distant corpses, with the harmonious complex of lines interconnecting them. Brueghel's work is filled with this sort of organizational rhythm and counterpoint marvellous to the art student, and for the rest of us appealing and melodiously satisfying.

If here a single figure dominates the canvas, other pictures—like *The*



Peter Brueghel: *Icarus Falling into the Sea*  
[Courtesy Brussels Museum]

Brueghel translates every scene into local idiom, and sometimes apparently forgets the parent idea almost completely. In the very fine and half-fanciful *Icarus Falling into the Sea*, the observer can by diligent search discover, down in one corner, Icarus's legs just disappearing into the water. But what a glorious seascape! And with what loving interest—and what broad yet sensitive artistry—is the foreground scene, with its familiar ploughing and shepherding, accomplished! When Brueghel did the *Christ Carrying the Cross*, now in Vienna, he all but hid the figure of Jesus, while the characters in the crowd and the holiday-like bustle of the extraordinary event are illustrated with spirit and relish.

Although a painter of man, in the widest and yet the minutest sense, Brueghel is one of the giants in the succession of artists who developed landscape. Even so broadly moralistic a picture as *The Blind Leading the Blind* shows the characters against a tenderly painted panoramic scene. In *The Hired Shepherd* one is likely to overlook the significance of figure and title—the literary and social, not to add humorous, values—while the luminous and spacious landscape is enjoyed. Before that, indeed, if the training in



Peter Brueghel *The Hired Shepherd*  
 [Courtesy John G. Johnson Art Collection, Philadelphia]

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*Massacre of the Innocents* and *The Road to Calvary*—exhibit scores or hundreds. Nor does the artist lose his way or impair the unity of impression. He accomplishes this partly by a device better known to Chinese than to Western painters by adopting "a high viewpoint." It is, however, a device traceable through a succession of un-Italianized Flemings to the miniatures and especially evident in Patinir's landscapes. The horizon line is raised and a panoramic effect is achieved with greater pictorial compactness and security. The successive planes are laid up with something like the Oriental tapestry in intention.

If mural decoration had been a Northern rather than an Italian art, Brueghel would have been a master of fresco. One may call in testimony the *Adoration of the Kings* in the National Gallery, London with its expert disposition of figures and its resolute holding of the eye to a shallow depth—range an exceptional example of contrived organization. Here again on the content side one finds a serious story—one in other times and climes considered too sublime for any but idealized treatment—brought to terms with everyday, individually imperfect human beings. There is a world of interest in secondary things in the king apparently nettled at kneeling yet gingerly offering his gift in the intently gazing soldier, in the boggle-eyed peasant at the right and especially in the side drama of Joseph and the whisperer. The religious sentiment evaporates of course when one has gone the rounds of these character bits but one returns to the gorgeous rhythm of the whole with renewed interest. Since it fails to convey the theme-sentiment effectively, the picture is inferior to many another Brueghel canvas but it illustrates exceptionally the artist's mastery of space-filling of mural technique and his characterization that grows out of the original Flemish homely and naturalistic tradition.

There were several later Brueghels but Peter the Elder was never equalled though his son of the same name left some pictures that approach his in panoramic interest. For the rest some artists turn back to second rate van Eyckian depiction others imitate the Italians and of course Bosch and Brueghel have their lesser followers. But the names are unimportant—until at the opening of the seventeenth century a youth trained in Antwerp by Italianized Flemings brilliantly pulls together several influences and manners which would seem mutually alien and unmixable and becomes the darling of all the courts of Europe. Peter Paul Rubens. But he is truly an internationalist belonging to the Era of Great Kings and he opens what is sometimes





Peter Brueghel *The Adoration of the Kings* [Courtesy National Gallery, London]

termed the Modern Age. He will grace better a chapter not concerned first with the humble if acute vision of Hubert van Eyck, and laudatory of the peasant witticisms, honest landscapes, and uncourtly grandeur of Brueghel.

If in the end one has said nothing of Flemish sculpture, it is because there has been little with distinctive character or more than mediocre quality since the late Gothic age—nothing but the products of eclecticism, chiefly of travelers to Italy. Architecture is in the same case, except that the Gothic impulse continued in the fifteenth century and even in the sixteenth, and a few monuments were added then to the treasury of medieval building. Such were the City Halls at Brussels and Ghent, and, less successful because over-ornamented, at Louvain. But what comes to one's mind at mention of "Flemish art" is a type of painting, born in the literal exactness of the van Eycks, flowering in the harmonious and appealing Madonnas of Dirk Bouts and Roger van der Weyden, and ending in the compositions, symphonic and yet earthy in a special way, of Bosch and Brueghel.

## CHAPTER XXII

### *Gothic Survivals and Reformation Developments The Art of Germany*

IT is said that when a Flemish painter visited Venice toward the end of the fifteenth century, and demonstrated the accuracy of delineation possible to the oil-painting medium as employed in the North Giovanni Bellini, then the foremost master in the Italian city, disguised himself as a gentleman and sat to the visitor for his portrait. Thus the Venetian learned by observation the secrets of the Flemish method. He was particularly pleased because after that he was enabled to make human eyes look more natural.

When Albert Dürer of Germany went to Venice in 1506, the elderly Bellini observed that another Northern school excelled in a different detail of naturalism. He had never seen hair rendered with the exactitude and delicacy evident in the works of the Nurnberg master. Durer having with native graciousness begged that he be permitted to co-operate with the Venetian artists. Bellini asked outright for the special brush he used in the painting of hairs. Durer was constrained to take up his common brushes and demonstrate then and there that it was the mastery of the hand and not the instrument that made possible the effect. 'I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it' commented Bellini—and he painted more believable hairs the rest of his life, and gained something else too for his followers Giorgione and Titian.

To complete the triangle, one may note that Dürer spent a considerable term in Antwerp, absorbing more of those influences which had already been felt in Cologne and Ulm and other German centres. Thus is made clear the internationalism of art at this time. The brief hour of German mastery occurs when this interchange of knowledge and impulse among the Christian nations of Europe is beginning. The Flemings have perfected the new miniature realism. Venice is giving fresh release to the spirit of the Italian Renaissance,

and each culture is curious about the other. And Germany is on the trade routes between Antwerp and Venice.

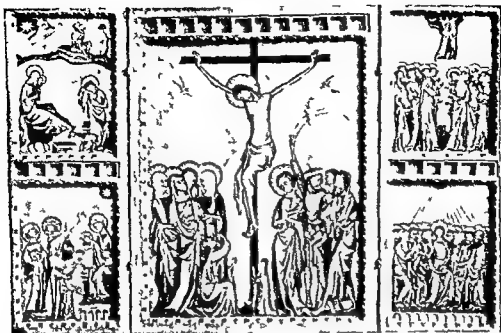
German art, restricted and only locally important before 1475, retains a native character during the next sixty years, but becomes peculiarly the expression of an impulse common to all of Northern Europe, is an extension of the typical Northern Gothic, if you like, worked upon but not absorbed by Italian Renaissance ideology.

Dürer is the foremost artist of the time. But for the student he is even more Dürer the internationalist is also Dürer solidly and incorruptibly Germanic. He is, incidentally, one of the most gracious personalities in the annals of art.

There was a moment when German art trembled upon the verge of a great synthesis. Had the wars of the Reformation not cut off the possibility of continuance, driving artists to other lands or destroying in youth those who should have been painters and sculptors, the German tradition instead of the Italian might later have prevailed in Europe, from the late sixteenth to the nineteenth century. As it was, the true German spirit found expression in any manner important to the rest of the world, only in a single generation. The work-life of every memorable native painter—Dürer, Cranach, Baldung, Grünewald, Holbein—falls within the period 1495–1550, barely over a half-century of accomplishment. Then the Protestant-Catholic disorders and finally the Thirty Years' War bathe the country in blood, make Germany inimical to art. The reformers are not content to curb further production of pictures: they fanatically burn and smash vast numbers of paintings and statues.

In that half-century, however, a distinctive national mode of expression had been established. Cranach is an essentially German painter, and so are Baldung and Grünewald. Dürer and the Little Masters at the same time created copper-plate prints never rivalled for brilliancy and vigour. Holbein and his fellows added a capital chapter to the history of wood-engraving.

All the sources were drawn upon: Gothic France, Franciscan Siena, independently creative Flanders, and the cities of Renaissance Italy. Nevertheless, there is in, say, Dürer's *The Four Horsemen* or Grünewald's *Crucifixion* something patently German, something of the vigour and the directness of statement that had characterized the art of Central Europe in the Dark Ages, when across this territory passed the tribes that fertilized the art of the North in Scandinavia, of the West in England and Ireland, of the South in Lombardy and Spain. If Gothic is the name given especially to the development that



Triptych by an unknown painter, Cologne school *Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne* [Photo, courtesy J B Neumann]

centred in France, Germany was earlier the home of the Goths, and carried on the style after French medievalism had given way to the siren spirit of the South

The German cities were medieval in character, and the German painter was just another craftsman, not the honoured celebrity that the Flemish artist had become, or the Venetian. It is from Durer's journals that the clearest light is cast on the conditions of the time. Many are his references to the higher position he is accorded when away from his native land. "Here I am somebody," he exclaims in Venice, "while at home I am counted a parasite." But back he goes to his own community, and his accustomed work, his eyes opened to new vistas, but without foolish notions that German art must be Italianized.

Again, he records the details of a trip to Flanders. He has worked hard on his engravings, and his wife has hawked the prints from stalls at the fairs, for which he has received a few coins. But in the Low Countries he finds himself feted and honoured. He is astonished at the lavishness both of the banquet

and of the praise heaped upon him in Antwerp, when the painters there entertained him at the Guild Hall

On Sunday night, the fifth of August, the painters invited me to their house together with my wife and her maid. The entire service was of silver and there were other handsome decorations. The food was most costly. All the wives of the painters were present at the company. I was seated at the head and they, at either side, as though I were a great lord. All did everything possible to be agreeable to me, and when I was seated thus with such honour the magistrate of Antwerp came with two servants and presented me with four jars of wine in the name of the city council, offering me every good wish. Afterward came the master of the carpenters and presented me with two more jars offering me his good offices. Thus we passed a pleasant evening until very late, and all the company accompanied us to our lodgings with lanterns in great honour.

Nürnberg with its gabled houses, its crooked streets, its markets, and its guilds may be visualized as the type city of Germany at the time of art's awakening still a medieval city in every lineament. Here world paths crossed, to be sure, but life went on in the old ways, the craftsman did his work well and remained anonymous, the community was piously Catholic—although there was already some agitation against the licentiousness and godlessness of Rome.

There are paradoxes and puzzles here. The Protestant spirit retards the spread of Renaissance culture in Central Europe, yet the intellectual independence of the revolting churchmen can be seen as resulting only from the mental freedom that is essentially of the Renaissance. The Northern churchmen distrusted the artists, if only because the Popes had made such showy—and often profane—use of art at Rome, in the Vatican Palace and St. Peter's and a dozen cardinals' palaces. Yet Dürer with his prints, and the cutters of woodblock illustrations, probably did more to popularize Christian illustration than any other artists in history.

Such is the confusion encountered when one asks what were the forces, social, religious and political which expressed themselves in the works of Altdorfer, of Dürer, of Cranach. Medievalism quickened by something out of the Renaissance, but resisting everything that the Italian Renaissance has become. A distinctive native expression vital and original enough to place the people among the foremost creators of art, yet an expression that is cut off in a single generation.

Perhaps it is that in this brief hour the German mind escaped the old mental



View of Ulm with the Minster Church illustrating persisting Gothic aspect  
[Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

fetters just at the moment when German craftsmanship came to full flower. For a moment, the freedom to think, the freedom to criticize, was attained, and the creative release came. Then too quickly the Reformation was accomplished and other prohibitions settled upon the artist.

As for the German land, it is implicit in this art, particularly the forests and the Rhineland. The curiously broken landscapes, the winding rivers, the hilltop castles, but above all the forests. Gothic art had always retained something of the forest spirit. Dürer carries that on. When he discovers nature as an aid to art, as its new source—as the Flemings had so suddenly discovered their fields and flowers and trees, as the Italians had haltingly discovered theirs—he puts into his pictures the actual crags and castles and woodland trees. But the forest is in his picturing in a deeper sense. Its upright line, its dark and shade, its restless minor movement, all have a counterpart in his method and conception.

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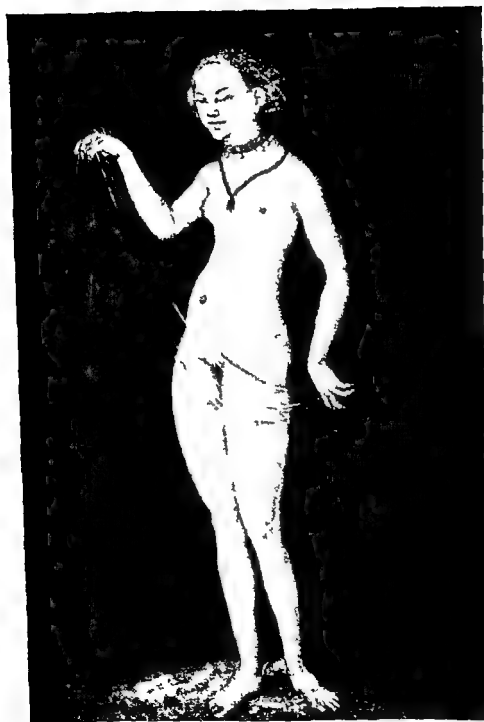
The German city, too, whether Nürnberg or Rothenburg or Augsburg is in the graphic art. Look from the high-gabled houses, the crooked streets, and the angular walls to almost any one of Dürer's engravings, and you can note the same wandering line, the identical angular movement and vitality. By contrast, place a German engraving beside a photograph of an Italian arcade or a neo-classic palace façade, and note how utterly unlike is the spirit of the one work from that expressed in the other.

German art remains through its flowering a Northern art. It is still Gothic, yet born anew out of its own land, in perfect keeping with its architectural environment and its landscape. Nowhere in it, except possibly in Holbein, who alone forsakes Germany, is the serene horizontal line dominant. The poise of the German picture is that born of complex movement delicately organized, with more of vertical than horizontal accent.

Behind it all, no doubt, are the dark German philosophy, and the German intellectual restlessness and analytical curiosity. The sensuous and formal values are not lacking—else in the modern view it would not be basically art—but they commonly and essentially subserve idea and subjective statement. It is emotional—this degenerates into sentimentalism in later centuries—or it is philosophical. Nowhere else is the *Dance of Death*, with its juxtaposition of bright and macabre themes, so common a subject. It is art exploring life, with death often enough walking beside life, never art contrived simply to soothe or to afford escape.

It is mystical to the extent that second meanings are inbuilt. Beyond the trees is the murmur from the depths of the forest. Above the portrait is a whisper of the seriousness of living. There is a good deal of the Faustian ever-seeking in both canvas and print. A body of art could hardly be farther from Greek (and Italian) clarity of statement and simple interest in the human form and idealized types. Equally alien to its analytic spirit is that other Italian development, 'the grand style,' with its empty rhetoric and windy decorativeness.

There was in Germany of course the late Gothic or early Renaissance awakening to the beauties of nature, which was common to all Europe. The native curiosity gave this swing to realism its own special direction so that the German development of accuracy in depicting flower and bird, or landscape, or human features, is neither the microscopically observed localized naturalism of the Flemings nor the science-derived and then prettified actuality of the Italians. It stands midway between with something of



Cranach Venus Art Institute, Frankfurt-on Main  
[Photo courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

the detailed patient truth of the one, and a breath of the larger imagining and humanism of the other. On the one hand there is the Northern minuteness and complexity, though the German seldom loses himself in the minute view as did the van Eycks, and seldom takes refuge in portraying facial curiosities and aberrations as did later Flemish painters. On the other hand there is a certain large dignity of the South, and an emphasis on human significance.

How much more generalized is the German humanism than the Flemish is announced by any one of Cranach's naively charming Venuses, so confident of their loveliness and so rhythmically synthesized. One involuntarily remembers with distaste Jan van Eyck's *Adam and Eve* and Mabuse's unsuccessful imitations of the Italian things—which turn out naked, not nudes.

It is Durer, nevertheless, who typifies the broad curiosity and the serious humanism of this amazing generation of Northern artists. He masters all that can be learned about the graphic arts in his own land. Then he travels, observes, writes, and philosophizes. His hand lags in cunning, drags behind his intellect, when he paints. But his prints are a sensitive index to a mind curious and erudite, almost encyclopædic. His art is deep, serious, studied. He rose above his fellows precisely by his ability to set out so much of observed life and of learning clearly and with technical brilliance, yet with profuse detail. Again one remembers the Gothic cathedral with its main lines coming clear out of multiplex columns and an intricate pattern of living ornament.

That Durer was minutely concerned with rocks and rivers, with pigs and dogs and horses, with faces and bodies and wings and armour, appears constantly. These prints and portraits and occasional religious paintings hold their place in the very front of the realistic advance now going forward in Europe. Perhaps the German love of nature, as such, is the most genuine of all. The Flemish is near-sighted, the Italian likely to be scientific—or erotic. Perhaps there is a clue in the innate pantheism of the Teutonic temperament.

In the South, man—or often enough woman—is the measure of all things. The North admitted no such measure. The old abstract ornament of the Dark Ages, and the animals in its art, then the medieval cathedrals that soared until they dwarfed man—these are signs of a different approach. The Germans of 1500 were broad enough to listen intently to the poems of Man as anthropomorphism. Again, they are on the Gothic side, with God an infinite distance from the earthbound human being.



*Christ in the Garden* by an unknown artist Lower Rhine school about 1500  
[Courtesy J In G Johnson Art Collection Philadelphia]

Painting is not by nature a medium agreeable to the Gothic ideal. The failure of the Germans to score heavily in that art is perhaps thus explained. Their black-and-white arts, particularly those dealing basically with line, transcend their painting. Before 1500 such painting as Germany had—sharing the misnomer “primitive” with Siennese and other early schools—was secondary to architecture and wood-carving. The picture was often enough merely an incidental panel in some large altarpiece which gave chief prominence to sculpture. And the painter was a subordinate worker.

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It is then no matter for surprise that when the one generation has passed again architecture, wood-carving, print-making, and the minor crafts absorb all original talent. It is the communal arts, the craftsmanlike arts, that triumph. Even in the half-century of Cranach and Grunewald and Baldung one gains only an indistinct vision of the working painter, of his patrons and his market, or of the pictures themselves gracing walls. But memory leaps up of the craftsmen's shops, of wood-carving and goldsmithing and heraldic emblems, of churches filled to overflowing with richly carved shrines and furnishings, ornamented tombs, and choir stalls, of house gables carved and touched in with gold and red and blue. The arts of wood are common above all.

In painting, the artistry is that of men accomplished in other directions. The method is over-linear. Even in Cranach, where the effects are apparently achieved flatly and fluently, it is the exquisite rhythmic contours that count for most. Durer's edges are over-sharp, and one actually looks for cross-hatching in his shadows. He loves to put an old stone wall, wherein every block can be outlined behind his characters, and he lavishes extraordinary care upon flowing tresses and luxuriant beards.

The exquisite expressive line is Holbein's first virtue. Line is so over-used by Altdorfer that one almost feels this to be a draughtsman wandered into the painting field by mistake. It is well to recall that the invention of printing in Germany was preceded by a century of marked activity in wood-engraving resulting in a body of black-and-white works of extraordinary vigour and variety. The block-books constituted a first attempt to give the masses an art medium corresponding to the illuminated manuscripts so long accessible to the learned and the rich. On the foundation laid by the block-book designers was raised the structure of late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century painting.

Germany had known one school of "primitive" painting comparable to that of Avignon, and reminiscent of the school of Siena. At Cologne an activity and a style developed not unconnected with the groups of mystics of the Lower Rhine territory. They, in their effort to reach back to a direct and simple communion with God, had found it expedient to resist the building of magnificent churches. But they approved the art of painting "which would kindle men's hearts toward God."

There is in the paintings a sweet nature-loving tenderly humanistic note



Master of the Life of Mary *The Annunciation* Alte Pinakothek, Munich  
[Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

suggesting the teachings of St Francis. Where other primitive artists—in Spain particularly, but also to a degree in France—had insisted upon, nay, gloried in, the wounds and sufferings of Jesus, urging men to self-scourging, these early Germans emphasize His lovingness and the harmony of man's life when devoted to Him. The pictures are like the Siennese, colourful and sensuously appealing.

It is not these qualities, however, that are mentioned in the earliest report of the school that has come down to us. The Bimbург Chronicle of 1380 says "There was in Cologne at this time a famous painter named Wilhelm whose like could not be found in all the land. He portrayed men so cunningly it seemed they were alive."

But Wilhelm of Cologne, praised thus in his own time for his realism, is only midway between Byzantine formalism and the coming free style, that

is, if the attribution of the *Madonna of the Bean-Flower* is to stand. Of another Cologne master more is known, for he lived to 1451—Stephan Lochner. His works have less of the simple linear harmonies and uninvolved backgrounds. The panel is filled with a number of enriching things. But it is worth while to note how the type-face has persisted, in this Virgin who has about her a dewy purity and a gentle grace. How much of increased naturalness came in the next generation may be guessed from the figures by the Master of the Bartholomæus Altar, in a panel from his major known work. The bodies have even begun to throw visible shadows!

There is a picture by the Master of the Upper Rhine which seems to sum up the service of the mystics in turning men's minds from the sufferings of the world. It is entitled *The Garden of Paradise*, and it depicts naïvely all those gracious things which he who gives himself to God will enjoy in the after-life. Here are birds and trees, flowers and fruits, a spring of fresh water, musical instruments and books—and the company of very aristocratic-looking saints.

The devotional, quietistic, and even joyous aspect is less evident in the works of other early German schools, although there is a gentle beauty about the pictures by Conrad Witz, who worked in Konstanz during the second quarter of the fifteenth century, and apparently a studied avoidance of the distressing episodes and details of the pious legends he illustrated. There were centres in Northern Germany, and even in Switzerland and Tirol, in Augsburg, where the activity was to lead on to the emergence of the Holbeins, and in Colmar, which gave to Germany a truly great traditional figure—Martin Schongauer. He was noted in his own time (he died in 1491) as the leading German painter and as an innovator.

Schongauer's panels retain a good deal of primitive formalism: they are stiffly posed and the draughtsmanship is heavy, but they reach forward to detailed depiction and there is an occasional landscape background or individually characterized face. The stiffer things are perhaps the best, for he seems to make decorative capital out of the rigid lines and the mathematically disposed figures. But it was in his engravings that Schongauer was most the master. More than any other artist he lifted the medium to the estate of an independent art, established the engraver above the anonymity that had been his, and left a mode and a technique of engraving ready for Dürer's hand. He



Conrad Witz *The Annunciation* Germanic Museum, Nürnberg  
[Photo courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

"What beauty is," Durer wrote, "I do not know, but it depends upon many things." Therefore, he continues, the artist must inquire widely, so that he will have "a mind well stored." The beautiful figure he makes, then, is not to be called wholly his own: it is partly "acquired and learnt." Nevertheless "the secret feeling of the heart" also is manifested in the image, and thus a new thing, not in nature but created, is brought into the world.

One might easily read into Durer's words a statement of aesthetics very similar to the most modern credo. The insistence upon the independent



and his early experience in book-illustrating doubtless conspired to direct his attention to the engraver's arts, which often took him from the painter's easel for considerable periods.

Wandering through Germany—and once perhaps as far away as Venice—during the next four years, the youth stored up impressions of people, places, and things and gained that wider outlook on life which the *Wanderjahre* are designed for. He returned home to Nurnberg to marry a neighbour's daughter. Her handsome dowry and his own industry secured him a modestly prosperous position in the community. His exceptional intellectual endowment and gentle manners brought companionship with the leading figures of his time.

In this first productive period at Nurnberg he worked in a spirit obviously inspired by lingering medieval ideals and traditions. The marvellously vigorous print, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, dated 1498, immediately proclaims its more Northern and Gothic character when placed beside prints made after the artist's Italian sojourn, such as the *Mary in the Temple*.

The one is filled with vital movement, with upward drive, is, for all its compact composition and clear motivation, almost nervously animated. The other has gained roundness, simplification, and repose. Perhaps the earlier manner was the better for the purpose Durer had then to illustrate in popular prints the Christian testaments and legendry, for a mediævally pious audience. That his sympathies were on the Reformist side, although he was never openly zealous in Luther's cause, is indicated in one of the engravings of the *Apocalypse* series, the Pope and Cardinals appearing among the wicked.

It was in 1505 that Durer went to Venice. A plague was then distressing Nurnberg and artists were hard put to it to secure work. Having borrowed money for the trip, he was gratified to find himself honoured in the Italian city, not only by the large German colony there, but by the Venetian aristocracy. The Doge and the city fathers offered him an official post if he would become a permanent resident. But after a year and a half he returned to Nurnberg. Although he is in general wary of criticism, he records in his diary that the Venetian painters "spend their time mostly in singing and drinking." Of the elderly Bellini, however, he writes affectionately, and with naïve pleasure at his own success. "Giovanni Bellini praised my work, before celebrities and nobles. He wishes to own one of my paintings, even though he pay for it. He is an excellent man."

Back in Germany, he carried on as before, painting when he felt he could



Dürer: *Self-Portrait* Alte Pinakothek, Munich  
 [Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

afford it, keeping the pot boiling by the making of prints. The Italian influences were absorbed, changing a little his way of statement, perhaps broadening his sense of composition. But he seems never to have been tempted to go over uncritically to the Italian fashion—as the Flemings of this period, Matsys and Mabuse, were doing, and as the Germans after the Reformation were destined to do. Just how much it meant for German art at this moment to have a leader who had gained an insight into Italian methods and ideals, yet resisted any national surrender to the Southern style, is impossible to





*Dürer: Portrait of Hieronymus Holzschuher. State Museum, Berlin*  
[Photo: courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

estimate. It is something of a miracle that Germany could already know so much of the Renaissance splendour, yet develop artistically along her own lines during the half-century before serious art is cut off.

The larger spirit is evident again and again in Dürer's journal. When he journeys to the Low Countries, he finds friends and inspiration among the artists there, praises sincerely, and exchanges knowledge. Of Patinir he

characteristically notes "Master Joachum, that good landscape-painter, asked me to his wedding and showed me all honour. I saw two fine plays there " And he speaks reverently of "the great master, van der Weyden "

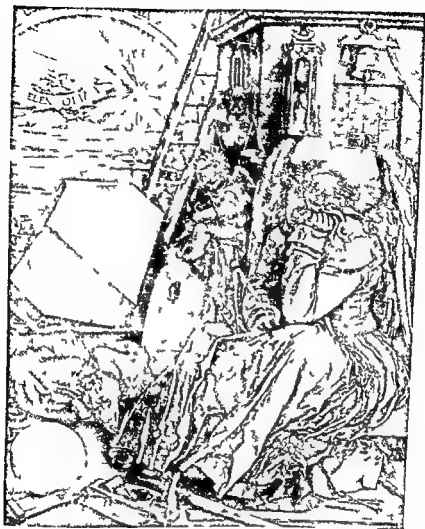
Most revealing and unusual is the enthusiasm he shows over examples of Aztec or Mayan art which had been brought overseas to Antwerp from newly discovered America "Never," he exclaims, "have I seen things which pleased me so much Besides their art, I was surprised at the subtle ingenuity of the people of those strange lands " Thus he added another to the impressions with which he had stored his mind, not being put off by the strangeness of objects that are known to seem repellent to some museum curators even to-day It was the other face of this idea of open-minded inquiry that led, no doubt, to Durer's readiness to give everything possible to other artists, and to impart to the people by the art that teaches while it pleases

Durer died in 1528, and it is fitting that so great a countryman as Luther should have written an epitaph filled with something of the same spirit of well-wishing and generosity "Christ gave him grace, and has removed him happily from among the present tempests, and mayhap from worse ones to come that he who was worthy to know only the best might not be subjected to the worst "

Of Durer's painting it may be said only that he could do a faithful portrait well, with Flemish truth to the model, with more than Flemish largeness and synthesis, but without inspiration The best ones are those not too far from drawing Such is the head of Hieronymus Holzschuher, or the half length portrait of the artist's father, or the *St Jerome* The religious pictures are likely to be a bit wooden in feeling with curious reversions to over-use of line Many historians list *The Worship of the Trinity* and *The Adoration of the Kings* among world masterpieces, but it would seem better to fall back upon the smaller paintings, or better, upon the engravings, which constitute a treasure nowhere equalled in linear art

If one seeks in Durer's paintings likeness to the art of other nations, the portraits will be found to approximate those of the later Flemish realists, while there are elsewhere affinities with the Italian paintings not of Giorgione and Titian but of Mantegna and Signorelli That he expended painstaking care on his pictures, in the Flemish way, is indicated by the inscription on a celebrated altar-panel done for the chapel of the German Exchange in Venice "Albert Dürer executed this work in 1506, in a period of five months "

That Dürer's prints, fresh from the presses, should have been hawked from



Durer *Melancholy* Engraving [Courtesy Fogg Art Museum Harvard University]

a stall at the Nurnberg or the Frankfort Fair, as a poor man's art gives us pause today, when every slightest thing from his hand is treasured by connoisseurs. Because the artist was a master the print takes on a larger dignity, even a splendour not before granted to the engraving. There is true magnificence in *The Four Horsemen* or *The Battle of the Angels*.

Whether the medium is woodcut block or engraved copperplate, there is an effect of richness not before achieved in black-and-white. The brilliancy

of an original print of the little *Angels with Veronica's Veil*, or the *Rider, Death, and Devil*, or *St Jerome in His Cell*, or *The Angel Stilling the Wind* is unprecedented, and nothing less than marvellous. The technique of it Dürer was to pass on to a group of "Little Masters," destined to leave to later generations a treasure of miniature prints. But none again equalled his achievement of grandeur with delicacy, of intense vigour with a jewel-like sparkle.

Perhaps with Dürer the prints were a side line, secondary to what he considered his important work of painting. They were necessary to do because a large edition paid immediate and continuing returns. Certainly the brilliance of his technique was built up for cheapness. Before his time it had been customary to use the woodcut print for outlines and then to colour over it, by hand or stencil. Dürer actually did away with colouring and obtained as rich and sparkling an effect by the manipulation of black lines only.

Lucas Cranach, born a year later than Dürer, is more significant as a painter, and a less important master—though still a master—of engraving. Of all the German artists he was nearest to a pure painter, and most individual in style. Little is known of his early life. Later he is everything that Dürer is not: he clings to certain primitivisms, he is joyously pagan in his apprehension of the beauty of the nude, he is a court painter (to the Elector Frederick the Wise). He lived in Wittenberg, Luther's city, and before his death at eighty-one he had been many things beside artist: pharmacist and ambassador, bookseller and burgomaster.

Some people affect to see an element of humour in all Cranach's nudes, and indeed there is a pertness about his ladies that faintly amuses. But there is so much of sheer rhythmic loveliness, of sensuous charm and plastic coherence, that today—when the attenuation of figure, which used to be termed "distortion" is recognized as necessary to the particular plastic effect intended—his pictures are again given prominent place on gallery walls, with devoted pilgrims always before them.

Without approaching the Italian way of regarding the nude—at this time considerably erotic—Cranach's work suggests an attitude very different from Dürer's: so much so that the two artists may be taken to illustrate the two extremes psychologically, within the German innocent delight in life. Dürer, despite his open mindedness, is self-conscious where nakedness is concerned. There is a line in his diary recording that when a near-nude girl appeared in a pageant at Antwerp he looked long and hard, being as he took



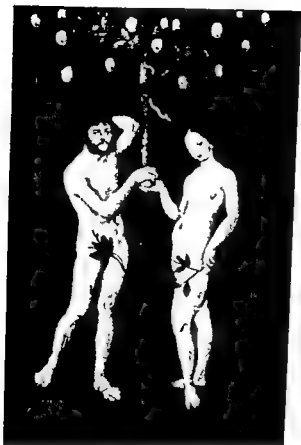
Cranach\* *Night in the Garden of Gethsemane* [Courtesy Art Institute, Chicago]



Cranach: *The Judgment of Paris* [Courtesy City Art Museum, St. Louis]

pains to explain, an interested painter. In contrast with Dürer's self-consciousness and rather ponderous seriousness, is the frank delight of Cranach, and his presentation of the body in its most melodious and decorative aspects.

There is nothing quite like his Eves and Venuses in the whole range of Western art. That Eve and the pagan goddess are shown so alike as to be



Cranach *Adam and Eve* [Courtesy Antwerp Museum]

indistinguishable without the labels—or a hint of serpent or apple with the one, a Cupid with the other—does not sit well with those who want religious picturing to be piously instructive. Nevertheless just as paintings the *Venus* at Frankfort, the *Eve* of the Uffizi the *Adam and Eve* at Antwerp, and the *Venus* of the Louvre are so seductive and appealing, in a naive, other-worldly way, that this sometime neglected artist seems likely to come into increased rather than lessened favour. He is not a 'large' painter—there is something cramped about his style—but he has a charm of his own.

There are portraits from Cranach's hand that retain something of primitive conventionalization even while indicating close study of Flemish meticulous realism. They have too a delicacy and freshness that is an original

innovation a special sort of linear preciseness that will be seen later in Holbein's works. Cranach's larger pictures done for religious purposes seem to this observer less successful, unless a picture of *Paradise* must be considered *ipso facto* religious. His wood-engravings, however, repay study, even though they are considerably less brilliant than Dürer's.

Two other painters escaped almost completely the linear incubus from which Dürer never freed himself. Mathias Grünewald and Hans Baldung. It is Grünewald who, more than any other German, approaches the spaciousness of Italian painting. He uses light-and-shade composition effectively, almost melodramatically. His major surviving work, the Isenheim altarpiece now in the museum at Colmar, verges on the theatrical in the strained posing of the figures. But the *Crucifixion* is, compositionally, an extraordinarily sound accomplishment, and its colouring is expert and rich.

The subject-matter is set forth with unexampled and unforgettable vividness and intensity of emotion. It is unpretty, is even insistently terrible. But there are those who feel that it transcends distressing reality, emerging in the realm of sublime tragedy. Unfortunately there is almost nothing else by Grünewald surviving, though some attributed pieces have rugged strength and expert finish. Nor is there more than a scrap of information about the painter's life: only the fact of his having lived at Mainz, saddened and lonely because the victim of an unhappy marriage.

Hans Baldung never matured into mastery of those special gifts of spaciousness, drama, and emotional intensity evidenced by Grünewald. He is more akin to Cranach in a certain ingenuous departure from realism. When he essays a portrait, however, he is hardly less microscopically accurate than the van Eycks. He had a favourite colour, green, and his name appears as often as not in the form of Hans Baldung Grien. But colour is his least happy accomplishment. He was, in his feeling for the disposing of figures in space, and in mastery of the brush, a born painter. His best-known work, the altarpiece at Freiburg im Breisgau, is alone sufficient to raise him to the first rank of German painters.

For a very long time Hans Holbein the Younger has been listed as the second artist of Germany, coming after Dürer alone. To the literalist, Holbein is the most accomplished German painter and perhaps the world's greatest portraitist. Recently he has declined somewhat in popularity, owing to the rather mechanical nature of his composition and technique. He is the most limited in range of all the artists recently accounted world masters. He is





Baldung *Crucifixion* Altar painting in the cathedral Freiburg im Breisgau  
 [Photo courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

known almost exclusively for portraits. In them he is undramatic, wholly unimaginative. Yet within his elected specialty, in spite of his rigid limitations, he is unmatched.

Holbein the Younger was born in 1497 at Augsburg. His father was an artist of no small ability, but without the son's talent for naturalism and his polished method. Times were hard for the artist family in Augsburg, and as a youth the son went to Switzerland. He made illustrations for book publishers in Basle, returned briefly to Germany, then settled in Basle. From illustrating, engraving, and craftwork he graduated into easel painting,



Holbein: *Double Portrait, Sir Thomas Godsalve and His Son John* State Gallery, Dresden [Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

specializing in portraiture. His few religious pictures, of which the once esteemed *Meyer Madonna* is most notable, are hard and academic, and over-detailed.

Times being troublous in Switzerland as well as in Germany, Holbein went to England. He carried a letter of introduction from Erasmus, whom he had painted in Basle, to Sir Thomas More, then a favourite of Henry VIII and powerful at the English court. Holbein was successful in giving his British sitters the sort of natural and attractively coloured likenesses they wanted; and so, after finding Switzerland again disturbed by the controversies over



*Holbein: Portrait of Dirk Berck. Detail Collection Jules S Bache, New York*  
[Photo, courtesy Duveen Brothers]

religion, and the air not healthful for so partisan a Protestant as he had become, he moved permanently to England. By 1532 Henry VIII had made him court painter, and had given him a studio in the palace of Whitehall with ample means for a living. He died in London in 1543, a world-renowned artist in his chosen field.

As a painter Holbein is at his best in simplest portraiture. There his extremely sensitive draughtsmanship shows to advantage. His besetting sin is over-labouring of detail, so that—considered as art organisms—many of his portraits are improved when accessories in background and corners are covered. Occasionally he concentrated the interest, laying out the field in large masses of dark and light, and suppressing detail except in head and hands. There the shading and lining are marvellously delicate and exact.



*Hans Maler Portrait [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

Holbein's claim to attention is as a realist with a miniaturist's technique. He could with pen or brush outline a nose or a cheek with masterly expressiveness. He worked up the hairs with a crow-quill pen rather than a brush. *It might almost be said that to the end he worked as a drawing-master rather than as essentially a painter.* This genius for microscopic truth appealed to upper British circles and Holbein has left to later generations a record of Henry VIII and his favourites and officers which is of great historic and human interest. One knows just how the Archbishop of Canterbury looked, or the Astronomer Royal or the king's falconer. There are likenesses,



Bartholomæus Bruyn Portrait of Gertrud Voss Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne  
[Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

too, of most of the ladies whom Henry VIII married or merely had a mind to marry. One who refused—possibly with the oft-quoted line, “I should be delighted if I had two heads”—was the sixteen-year-old Duchess of Milan. The simple and dignified portrait is now in the National Gallery, London.

There is an anecdote that neatly sums up Holbein’s mastery and its limits. He called at the studio of another famous painter, who proved to be away. He tarried long enough to paint a fly on the surface of a picture which stood on an easel. The other artist when he returned tried to wave the fly away, then to brush it off. When he saw what it really was, and the exacti-

tude of its rendering, he knew that none other than Holbein could have been the visitor

There were painters in Germany during Holbein's service abroad, and during the decades after. But his flight is symbolic Christoph Amberger, also of Augsburg, carried on the tradition of German realistic portraiture, with only a little less of mastery, in the second half of the sixteenth century Bartholomæus Bruyn of Cologne also was a very accomplished portraitist, somewhat influenced by the Flemish painters Mention may be made, too, of Hans Maler, born in Ulm but long resident in Tirol He painted portraits attractively combining naturalism with a posteresque simplification After the mid-century the Protestant hostility or indifference to art is fully felt There is not another internationally known painter until the neo-classicist Mengs, of the eighteenth century, who elects to live in Italy and Spain

After the triumph of the Reformers, indeed, it is the more stolid arts that flourish particularly sculpture in wood But naturalism has long since injured the sculptural art. The best in Germany occurs where the medieval tradition persists By 1600 the baroque spirit has pushed up from Italy, although its worst excesses occur after 1750 when the appearance of flight is actually attempted in sculpture What had in Durer's time seemed the true, sober German spirit, had then been dissipated, and up to the twentieth century there is to be only a rather weak reflection of successive developments from foreign centres—in general, all within the march of realism

## CHAPTER XXIII

### *Rembrandt and the Hollanders*

HOLLAND affords the first example of a national art truly democratic, escaped from priestly, kingly, and aristocratic domination, and for the partisan of democracy the result is deplorable. For the Dutch exhibit, aside from the works of one genius, is the most prosaic, unexciting, and earthbound in the annals of greatly celebrated art. The light of Rembrandt's surpassing genius gives splendour to this national display, in the early seventeenth century, and afterwards there is the exquisite but pale glow of Vermeer's artistry. All the others together—there are very many of these Dutch painters, as befits democracy—emit only a dull, routine, and almost negligible light.

Ever since we first encountered "civilized" society, back in Sumeria in the thirty-fifth century B.C., art has been the apanage of a top class, the possession usually of royalty or the higher priesthood. Always the elect have patronized the artist and controlled his product. In Babylonia it was the emperors, in Egypt the priests. In Greece for a brief season it was the free nobles. In Rome when the first great republic was born, before the advent of the emperors, it was the patricians and military victors. Then again there was an immense period when church rulers and royalty vied with each other to control life and art, or church and court merged, as often happened, so that the artist served an emperor-pope or a cardinal-prince.

In Spain at this very time of Holland's emergence as a nation, all art serves the magnificent court at Madrid or the churchmen and grandees in lesser cities. In Venice and Flanders the rich merchants and traders have pushed forward as socially significant, and as patrons, but in the one case the pictures are obviously painted for palaces, as attestations of grandeur, in the other they are still either church decorations or portraits of the well-to-do, with only an occasional hint of tavern scene or household life. They begin to be filled,

it is true, with familiar detail, of flower and field, of cloth texture and homely facial expression, but these common things are fitted into pleasure pictures for the rich or show pieces for the religious shrines. Flanders, indeed, is still a Burgundian royal domain, and very Catholic. In Germany, too, despite the creation of a popular art of prints, beautifully practised by Dürer, the larger arts are still for the old patron-classes. Cranach is a court painter, and Holbein, last of the great Germans, goes over to the single work of immortalizing the features of kings and aristocrats.

It is only when the story of Holland is reached that the fisherman and the humble housewife, the windmill and the cow—yes, the turnip and the beer-mug—seriously sit for their portraits. The Flemish realism of method, perfected when Holland and Flanders were socially and politically one, is here joined with that other realism that brings art down to the lower levels of living for its choice of subject-matter. The painting renounces man of his own houses and fields instead of heaven and legendary saints, flatters the doctor and the captain of the guard and the bulb-grower instead of king and duchess.

Holland freed heroically of king and overlord, freed of the influence of the Roman Church, jealously assertive of the common citizen's rights, thus democratizes art. Bourgeois taste demands its new types of painting. The burgher patron wants himself immortalized, or his surroundings (though he wants too the courtly extravagance in picture-frames, the rich encrustation and the gilt). Painters respond, in hordes.

But democracy is not a success *for the artist*. Paintings are overproduced and are soon underpriced. A canvas will hardly sell for the price of a day's meals. Dealers appear, to buy pictures low and await the chance to sell high. The patrons too are fickle, more fickle even than kings and churchmen had been. A painter who has enjoyed a period of acclamation and popularity may be cast aside, if fashions change or he dares an unfamiliar manner. Hals is thrown on charity toward the end and dies a pauper. Rembrandt is sold up for debt, lives out his life in neglect, and is buried not as a recognized artist but as an obscure and beggarly Ghetto character. Jan Steen runs a pub to eke out a living, and de Hooch turns nian-servant. Nevertheless these unfortunate artists create the style or mode that the new public wants. An art is born, and with it a new way of living for the artist. This is of course, the beginning of the story of the artist in the modern capitalist state just as it is the beginning of the seventeenth-eighteenth-nineteenth-century picturesque and genre painting.



Rembrandt transcends his times. He rises above all the restrictions put on him, at first by popularity, then by cramping poverty and neglect. He creates a body of art that constitutes nine-tenths of the entire Dutch significant achievement. He is the art of Holland, for the rest of the world. He stands for a national achievement more singly than does an artist in any other major country (Spain has Velazquez and Goya in addition to El Greco). But the others create the local, typical Dutch thing. And theirs, the first democratic gallery of art, is the levellest and dullest of all.

Before Rembrandt is Hals alone, a realist widely acclaimed as a world master within the memory of us all, but recently eased out of the top list, with Murillo and del Sarto and Guido Reni. Before Hals's time the Hollanders had generally trooped off to Flanders when they felt the call of art, or later had practised at home a pale imitation of Italian "grand style," or natural picturing in the classic manner. And after Rembrandt, even while he works, except for his own contribution, the level is that of routine filling of demand, an extraordinary output of uninspired portrayals of common surroundings, endless "views," pictures of cows in meadows, boats on the canals, ruddy girls and self-satisfied grocers, household interiors and family incidents, taverns and drinking. Some names are remembered for happy lighting effects accomplished or for trifles of homely sentiment recorded: ter Borch and de Hooch—and Vermeer lifts the mode to beautifully arranged and exquisitely finished, if over-photographic transcription, while landscape is at last cleared of man's presence and rendered natural, by van Goyen and Ruysdael and Hobbema.

When the Hollanders defied the foreign kings, while their blood-brothers in Flanders bent the knee, a new chapter of political history was opened. A small people by heroic struggle and superb self-reliance fought its way to independence and then to commercial supremacy. The citizens freed themselves from paying taxes to resident or absentee monarchs or privileged princes and regents. They opened the way to a free and extensive foreign trade. They destroyed the last vestiges of control of the conscience from Rome.

The revolt started in 1567, a declaration of independence is dated 1579, the wars dragged on until 1609, and recognition of the Dutch Republic was not fully granted until 1648, at the Peace of Westphalia. Thus Hals (1580-1666) began painting before fighting had ceased, and carried on into the most

settled and prosperous era of national life, while Rembrandt, born in 1606, hardly knew the time of war at all. If the nationalist critics are right, the era just following the attainment of independence, hard upon heroic deeds and economic and territorial expansion, should have produced great art, reflecting heroism, aspiration, and spiritual advance. But there is little sign of anything of the sort in the Dutch galleries.

Some observers feel that the Reformation was a backward step, removing men from refreshment at spiritual sources and that it is Protestantism that renders routine Dutch art so materialistic and dull. Certainly the Protestant states have failed to produce any large art expression, and none at all that reflects a new spiritual consciousness—there is no Protestant art that rivals the Catholic, or for that matter, the Buddhist, Mohammedan, or Taoist—but Catholic art since the Reformation has been equally uncreative and unexciting, even more superficial and tasteless. We may therefore have to fall back upon the fact that art all over Europe becomes comparatively uncreative and impotent, in Catholic and Protestant countries alike, when the third estate is gaining power, when the upper crust of the bourgeoisie, the money-makers are becoming the patrons. The few geniuses are outside the lines of national developments, of traditional styles and schools.

In any case the decay of faith is not to be overlooked as a factor. For thirteen centuries the great body of European art had been religious, whether in painting or illumination, sculpture or enamel, architecture or minor craft. The cathedrals are matched by the paintings of Giotto and Michelangelo and El Greco. The artist had been a man of faith, sharing a common conviction and an inner fire with the men he worked for. Now the conviction was gone on both sides. The artist, in escaping Rome, had lost his mightiest incentive. No artist since Rembrandt (who alone in his time clung to religious themes) has found a spiritual reason for his picturing, to take the place of naïve Christian devotion.

The cry was that art henceforward would serve man instead of God. Heroes would be glorified instead of saints. A peaceful earth would interest citizens more than a hypothetical heaven. But art apparently paid a staggering price for this freedom, this descent from God-worship to man regard.

Perhaps the answer is that the painters of Holland simply were not great enough. They were enabled to portray but not to glorify their own people and their own country. The collective portrait is interesting and pleasing, just as the homely ways of this self-respecting, clean-living people are interesting



Rembrandt *The Anatomy Lesson* Detail  
[Courtesy Royal Picture Museum, The Hague]

and pleasing. But one looks at the gallery of paintings as one would at a photographic record of equally attractive landscapes and persons. It is homy, intimate, appealing. But it is prosy, unexciting, colourless.

A country's physical aspects to a certain degree shape its art. This painting without eminence (the nation, incidentally has no sculpture, and no original architecture until the twentieth century) is perhaps in accord with the horizon-hugging landscape, the level dikes, and the rainy climate. The character of the thrifty burghers and frugal housewives, too, is in the clean and tidy pictures, in the neat craftsmanship and undramatic documentation. A transcript of Holland, perfectly literal or slightly sentimentalized—but nowhere dramatized or lifted.

Of course this exact imaging of familiar things, of cow-strewn fields and sails against cloudy skies, of an old woman combing a child's hair, or of a pair of toppers, was a novelty, and therefore something to marvel at in its own day. But it faded into an exhibition of craftsmanship and a bondage to one small corner of nature as the outward eye records it. Rembrandt alone brings to it the two elements that may lift any content to the realm of great art: the subjective "second sight" which enables the artist to perceive more than common folks in (or beneath) the object, and the understanding of plastic organization.

Back in those days before the separation of Holland and Flanders, when the Low Countries constituted a single political unit, it had been a custom for art students from Haarlem and Leiden and Utrecht to go to Bruges, and later to Brussels and Antwerp, for training, and then to practise. One went where masters already were, where buyers came. While Flanders was still Gothic in spirit, although establishing the methods of the new secular realism, several of the most talented artists had emigrated from the Dutch cities, most notably Dirk Bouts and Albert van Ouwater. They are to be followed later by that strange genius Jerome Bosch, by Gerard David and Mabuse, and finally by the great master Peter Brueghel. Because they spent their working years in the Flemish cities they all are treated by historians (except the Dutch) as Flemish painters.

But to indicate that Holland was not without an art life of its own, one may mention Geertgen tot Sint Jans (known also as Geertgen van Haarlem), who stayed at home and gave importance to the school of Haarlem. He left more than a dozen pictures which show him to have departed a little from the

current Flemish exactitude of statement. He broadened the technique of the Low Countries art and is even, with cautious reservations, mentioned as a forerunner of Rembrandt. Dürer was so enthusiastic when he first saw Geertgen's work that he exclaimed "He was a painter before he left his mother's womb." Geertgen was another of those who advanced landscape painting—although not yet, of course, in the fifteenth century, as a separate or separated art. Had he lived to maturity—he died at twenty-eight—he might have been one of the very great figures. His influence was wide upon Gerard David among the Hollanders who went to practise in Flanders, upon Jan Mostaert and Jacob Cornelisz, painters of a slightly lower rank who close the story of the school of Haarlem as such. They contributed competent pictures that are found today on the walls of leading museums.

There followed a school of Leiden, of which Cornelis Engelbrechtsz was the first notable figure. His pupil Lucas van Leiden is the better known, less for his paintings than because he became an engraver second in ability and fame to Dürer alone. He met the master of Nurnberg when both were visiting in Antwerp in 1521, and Dürer gave him prints and drew a portrait of him. Lucas gained immensely by the contact. His copper engraving is brilliant, and his realism is less Gothic than the German's; it suggests in fact a breath of Renaissance clarity and freedom. His prints mark the highest point touched by pre-Rembrandtian art in Holland.

At this time one encounters a real wave of Italianization flowing over the Northern countries. The painters who were washed along by it are unimportant, although they imitated the Southern manner more successfully than did their Flemish fellows. Some of their nudes even are believable and attractive. More interesting as an individual, however, and as a symbol, is the painter whom the Dutch call Antoon Moor van Dashorst. He is that accomplished portraitist whom we met in Spain under the name Antonio Moro, who in England was Sir Anthony More. He had been born Dutch, and trained with Jan Scoorel of Haarlem, then went to Flanders, then to Italy, he served the Habsburg Emperor Charles V, progressed in turn to Spain, Portugal, and England, and became court painter to Philip II at Madrid. He finally returned to Brussels under patronage of the notorious Duke of Alva, who carried the methods of the Inquisition into the Low Countries, prosecuting the campaigns known as the Spanish Terror.

Moor's career affords a sidelight on the interconnexion of the courts of Europe at the time, and the distribution of both the works and influence of



Lucas van Leiden *Adoration of the Kings* [Courtesy Art Institute, Chicago]

such masters and near-masters as Titian, Holbein, Velazquez, and Murillo. There will follow other great figures in the paths of royal art: Rubens and Van Dyck. But Antoon Moor, like all of those, is outside the real story of Dutch art, of the republican spirit and the burgher painting. The book of his portraits, however fascinating historically, is an international gallery of kings, queens, dukes, and knights, of the Tudors and Habsburgs, and of Alva himself—all hateful to the Hollanders.

Frans Hals signalizes the transition from court portraiture to citizen portraiture. Born in 1580 to parents who had been and were later to be residents of Haarlem, but who were temporarily driven by the war to Antwerp, he early knew of Holland's troubled fortunes, at first hand. But as painter he rode in on the wave of civic enthusiasm and self-satisfaction that came with virtual though not final victory and independence. His direct method, flatter-

ing "splash," and freedom from inspirational flights fitted him perfectly to serve the new citizen masters

His well-advertised habits of tipping, which got him up for wife-beating, would hardly claim attention if it were not for a corresponding gusto and expansiveness, not to say recklessness, evident in his method of painting. Some say he could not paint without being near-drunk. One might add as the moral of the tale, however, that Hals never escaped a certain coarseness of statement. His work is characterized by extraordinary dash and bravura, considering that he retained the true Low Country camera-realism as a base. But there his eminence ended.

He was well esteemed by his fellow-citizens, and well patronized. It may have been personal weakness rather than public apathy that put him into bankruptcy and, at the end, permitted him to die a ward of charity. While he prospered, none was more popular. He specialized in single portraits and "corporation pictures." The corporations were like guilds, but usually military in character: they were organized companies of citizens who had fought together in the wars against Spain, or they might be united groups of hospital-regents or an actual guild of doctors or drapers.

The military corps in particular entered importantly into the civic and social life of the day. Each one had its club-house, and the walls must be adorned with pictures which would feed the vanity of the members—and the officers. The corporation or company picture resulted. Each member whose portrait appeared in the group paid a proportionate share of the cost. The painter received a stated amount for each head and an additional sum for each hand. (The hands are, in number, out of proportion to æsthetic needs in many of the examples.)

Who better for this new social art than the convivial and flattering Hals? He had the verve, the sense of display, and the theatrical touch. Through his brushes all the company members in every corporation turn out dashing gallants. The picture itself is brilliantly alive and contagiously spirited, just the crowning ornament for a social room. It is not to be overlooked that as portraiture, too, beyond the trick of flattering elegance and dashing brush-work, these canvases are essentially truthful, with a fleeting expression caught and fixed effortlessly.

But the excellences are within the range of documentary statement and technical virtuosity. Of the art in its deeper aspects of expressive organization, Hals is comparatively innocent. A French painter once exclaimed "No



Lucas van Leiden *Adoration of the Kings* [Courtesy Art Institute, Chicago]

such masters and near-masters as Titian, Holbein, Velazquez, and Murillo. There will follow other great figures in the paths of royal art: Rubens and Van Dyck. But Antoon Moor, like all of those, is outside the real story of Dutch art, of the republican spirit and the burgher painting. The book of his portraits, however fascinating historically, is an international gallery of kings, queens, dukes, and knights, of the Tudors and Habsburgs, and of Alva himself—all hateful to the Hollanders.

Frans Hals signalizes the transition from court portraiture to citizen portraiture. Born in 1580 to parents who had been and were later to be residents of Haarlem, but who were temporarily driven by the war to Antwerp, he early knew of Holland's troubled fortunes, at first hand. But as painter he rode in on the wave of civic enthusiasm and self-satisfaction that came with virtual though not final victory and independence. His direct method, flatter-



ing "splash," and freedom from inspirational flights fitted him perfectly to serve the new citizen masters

His well-advertised habits of tippling, which got him up for wife-beating, would hardly claim attention if it were not for a corresponding gusto and expansiveness, not to say recklessness, evident in his method of painting. Some say he could not paint without being near-drunk. One might add as the moral of the tale, however, that Hals never escaped a certain coarseness of statement. His work is characterized by extraordinary dash and bravura, considering that he retained the true Low Country camera-realism as a base. But there his eminence ended.

He was well esteemed by his fellow-citizens, and well patronized. It may have been personal weakness rather than public apathy that put him into bankruptcy and, at the end, permitted him to die a ward of charity. While he prospered, none was more popular. He specialized in single portraits and "corporation pictures." The corporations were like guilds, but usually military in character: they were organized companies of citizens who had fought together in the wars against Spain, or they might be united groups of hospital-regents or an actual guild of doctors or drapers.

The military corps in particular entered importantly into the civic and social life of the day. Each one had its club-house, and the walls must be adorned with pictures which would feed the vanity of the members—and the officers. The corporation or company picture resulted. Each member whose portrait appeared in the group paid a proportionate share of the cost. The painter received a stated amount for each head and an additional sum for each hand. (The hands are, in number, out of proportion to æsthetic needs in many of the examples.)

Who better for this new social art than the convivial and flattering Hals? He had the verve, the sense of display, and the theatrical touch. Through his brushes all the company members in every corporation turn out dashing gallants. The picture itself is brilliantly alive and contagiously spirited, just the crowning ornament for a social room. It is not to be overlooked that as portraiture, too, beyond the trick of flattering elegance and dashing brush-work, these canvases are essentially truthful, with a fleeting expression caught and fixed effortlessly.

But the excellences are within the range of documentary statement and technical virtuosity. Of the art in its deeper aspects of expressive organization Hals is comparatively innocent. A French painter once exclaimed "No



Hals *The Jolly Toper* [Courtesy Royal Museum Amsterdam]

one ever will paint better than Hals. But one remembers that Hals's great reputation was built up in an era when truth to model and a flashing style were the first tests the era of Sargent, Sorolla, and Zorn. Increasingly a superficiality and a coarseness have been recognized in Hals's achievement. He is known today as a diverting painter—hardly more—for his hearty



*Hals Regents of the Old Men's Home Detail*  
[Courtesy Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem]

materialism, his swaggering virtuosity with the brush, and a strain of sympathetic humour. His is portraiture with a disarming gusto and a dazzling spontaneity. After the pleasure of the first impression, the observer is conscious of the perfunctory organization, the rather shallow understanding, the journalistic shortcutting.

It was during the brief stay in Leiden of those dissenters who are called in America the Pilgrim Fathers, that a child was born there and given the name Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, or Rembrandt son of Harmens of the Rhine. The year was 1606. Harmens was a comfortably prosperous miller with four other children. Rembrandt was to have been a scholar and accordingly was sent to the Latin school. But having proved by indirection that he was good for nothing except art, he was apprenticed at the age of fifteen to an obscure local painter named Swanenburch. After three years he was



Rembrandt: *The Man in a Gold Helmet* State Museum, Berlin  
(Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office)

sent to Amsterdam to study with Peter Lastman, then fashionable because he could paint in the manner of the Italian classicists, which had not quite given way before the craze for local naturalism. Since Lastman himself had studied with a German in Rome, he doubtless gave Rembrandt a curiously mixed

dose of internationalism. The effect was evidently beneficial, for Rembrandt became the only painter of Holland who transcended national limitations, the only Dutchman who is universal. The training was good because it broadened the young man's outlook without setting his feet on the path to Italy. It is not known that he ever stepped outside the borders of Holland.

He began independent practice of his art in Leiden, but after a few years decided upon Amsterdam, then a thriving commercial city, as a more favourable field. He was twenty-five years old when he settled there. Within a short time he was the city's leading artist, specializing like his rivals in portraiture. He was already a master of the etching medium.

In that biography of Rembrandt entitled *R. v. R.*, purporting to be a work by the artist's physician, one Joannis van Loon, but written—with a great amount of local colour, collateral history, and incidental philosophy—by Hendrik Willem van Loon of our own generation, the author affords a picture of the prosperity of Amsterdam at this time, and of the citizen patrons of art. The physician is speaking:

I had in the meantime seen a great many paintings. Our city was full of them. It sometimes seemed to me that our town would burst from sheer riches, like a sack too heavily loaded with grain. Our harbours were more crowded than ever. The streets near the Exchange gave one the impression of a continual county-fair. During the morning hours, when the musicians played on the Dam, one saw as many Turks and Germans and Blackamoors and Frenchmen and Britishers and Swedes, and even people from far-away India, as one did Dutchmen. . . .

They [my neighbours] would retire from the business of storming the gates of Heaven and Hell and would turn respectable and they would buy themselves large and comfortable houses in one of the newly laid out parts of the town . . . and of course they must show their neighbours how rich they were (what is the fun in having bags and bags and bags of money if no one knows it?) and so they filled their houses with elegant French chairs that weighed a ton and with Spanish chests that only a mule could move and with pictures—rows and rows and still more rows of pictures.

As a result, wherever I went, whether my patient happened to be a simple butcher from the Volderstraat or a rich Indian merchant living on the fashionable side of the Heerengracht, I found myself surrounded by miles and miles of coloured canvases. Some of them were probably very good and a few of them were undoubtedly very bad, but most of them were of a very decent quality, as the Guild of St. Luke maintained the highest possible standards and no one could hope to qualify as a master until he had spent years and years in a very exacting and very difficult apprenticeship.



Rembrandt *The Man in a Gold Helmet* State Museum Berlin  
 {Photo courtesy German Railroads Information Office}

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Rembrandt prospered with the rest, and his art grew. Then a great happiness befell him. He had been, perhaps, something of a plodder, and so extraordinarily wrapped up in the pursuit of his art—at which he worked day and night, with a passionate absorption—that he had failed to acquire the usual social graces. Besides he *was* the son of a miller. But suddenly he fell in love with a beautiful girl of both social position and moderate wealth. They were married, after some skirmishing with her outraged relatives—she was throwing herself away on a fellow known to be not only an artist, but a low-born one at that.

Rembrandt adored Saskia, at least when he was not absorbed in that very important business, painting and etching. The two young people seem to have had grand times together, and some of their joy is reflected in the portraits he painted of her. Using his own earnings, now large, and her dowry, Rembrandt showered upon her the sorts of finery to which artists' wives are not accustomed. At the same time he indulged his own taste for art works building up a collection made notable by paintings of Raphael, Giorgione, and the van Eycks, besides many works by Dutch artists whom he admired or wanted to encourage. He bought, too, a large house, in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam.

But the years of his happiness with Saskia, and of material prosperity, were few. He had gone deep into debt, Saskia's relatives made trouble, and with one thing and another he found himself on the road to bankruptcy. Two catastrophes overtook him within a single year. Saskia died, and he alienated his patrons and the public. While the second event helped to wreck his immediate fortunes, it signalled the saving of his artistic soul, and so it is not to be regarded as catastrophe but as good fortune for the rest of the world. What Rembrandt had done was to defy popular taste, which had held him, in his market output, to the standard camera-truth portraiture. He had raised realism to its highest level, to be sure, but without imagination, or sacrifice of "reasonable" surface truth to plastic necessities. Now he chose to go beyond truth as the casual eye sees it on to expression of his own inner vision.

The actual painting which marked his change of direction, which turned the public from him, was that most famous of corporation pictures, *The Night Watch*, more correctly known as *The Sortie of the Banning Cock Company*. The members of the company had expected a canvas upon which exact and prominent likenesses of all the individuals would be brought





Rembrandt. *The Night Watch* [Courtesy Royal Museum, Amsterdam]

together in a single group-portrait, and no foolishness about artistic organization, pattern, emphasis, and all that rot. Rembrandt eight years earlier had painted a prime picture of the sort for the doctors, known as *The Anatomy Lesson*. But now he chose to consider his art problems more important than squaring his work with the vanity—or rightful demands, if you will—of his customers. He produced a picture that was a masterpiece as a composition, a daring arrangement of light accents in a darkened field, an imposing *tour de force* in light-dark manipulation. But imagine the dismay of certain company members at finding their own portraits half-obsured, or smaller by half than those of the fellows up front.

Then and there Rembrandt's standing as a popular painter was destroyed. This finest of all company pictures was defaced, its balance and fullness of

effect badly impaired by the cutting of two figures from one side and the cutting off of strips at top and bottom. The offended corporation had adjudged it unfit for the intended place of honour in the club hall, and thus callously cut it down to fit it into an anteroom. Even so it retains today an exceptional effectiveness. It is perhaps as celebrated as any work from the master's hand.

So Rembrandt lost his market, except for a few devoted friends. He seems to have cared less than might have been expected. He found more and more consolation in working passionately at his two arts, pushing farther and farther into understanding of the potentialities of painting and etching. He had some sort of home-life, not without its contentments and its protective effect upon his work. One Hendrickje Stoffels became his housekeeper if not legally his wife, and took good care of Titus, the only surviving one of the four children born to Saskia. Hendrickje was loyal to her artist-master and should perhaps be credited with the management that postponed the catastrophe of bankruptcy for a further term of years—during which Rembrandt produced many of his masterpieces. It was in 1656, when he was fifty, that his creditors sold him out, took his house, and auctioned his own and his collected paintings for pitifully small prices for such a mere fraction of their value that he was left under a burden of debt and a succession of minor persecutions that clouded the rest of his life.

But still he had his art, and mercifully some copperplates had been left to him. He took a house further in the Ghetto. For one moment he re-emerged into the popular world. An old friend got him a commission for another corporation picture, and he painted it with a fine balance of artistry and portrait-exactitude. Indeed *The Syndics of the Cloth Guild* stands with *The Anatomy Lesson* in the very first rank of works of this genre. But this success was a flicker. No more commissions came. Hendrickje died. Rembrandt seems in the years that followed never to have been in actual physical want, although doubtless poorly nourished. Nor could he feel unhappy or defeated continuously so long as he had his art.

His dignity and self-discipline were especially remarked when he saw his son Titus follow the others of his loved ones to the grave. He went on painting. His eyes had been overstrained long since in his etching work, and his portfolio of prints was therefore closed. In this last period he painted self-portraits that contrast strangely with those of the early days when he had shown himself in princely costumes and endowed with almost arrogant self-



Rembrandt *The Syndics of the Cloth Guild* [Courtesy Royal Museum, Amsterdam]

confidence. But the last things have a notable human dignity too. He died in 1669. Holland had long before forgotten him. The parish officials put him down on the mortuary records as "a painter on the Roozengracht, opposite the doolhof," in order, says Louis A. Holman, "that he might not be confounded with some other old man."

In the ultimate view the forgotten old man needed no recompense for neglect. He had kept his integrity. It might have pleased him to know that in later ages his works would be considered incomparably the greatest gifts of Holland to the larger world. Apparently no artist ever had less interest in the reaction to his paintings, or more in the process of conceiving and producing them.

Even the swiftest glance through a gallery of his works indicates that he outdistanced every competitor in all those branches especially characteristic of the Dutch: the intimate forthright portrait, the corporation picture, the genre bit, even the landscape. He took the current fashionable thing in portraiture and landscape and made it more vital than it had been, injecting something of his philosopher's insight and adding values out of his equip-



Rembrandt: *Portrait of Nikolaus Bruyninck* Detail State Gallery, Cassel  
 [Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

ment as creative plastic artist. He went on to add achievements in fields closed to his fellows. He carried on religious painting—was indeed the last master in that realm. He did not hesitate to attempt a classic subject if the mood struck him.

In portraiture—he stands with Titian, El Greco, and a very few others in the first rank—Rembrandt added to his instrumental artistry a deep psy-



*Rembrandt Portrait of a Man*  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

chological insight. His interest ran to people of character, to faces eloquent of philosophic adjustment to living, particularly those marked by struggle and sorrow. The face chiselled by experience—this gave content to the superb portraits, the character studies of the persecuted Jews in whose quarter the Rembrandts lived, and the sympathetic and penetrating portraits of the artist's mother and other old women, kindly, or gravely quizzical, or bravely

submissive. Seldom has outward truth—the Low Countries' basic naturalism—been so carefully respected and retained, with the addition of character revelation, together with lifting of the work into the realm of transcending plastic art.

The means upon which Rembrandt exceptionally relied, in arriving at pictures of intense formal vitality, was lighting. Where other masters had orchestrated their works with the full quota of plastic instruments, with volumes disposed geometrically in space, with related planes, with textures and the interplay of colours, he studied especially the play between light and dark. He is the foremost master in the manipulation of *chiaroscuro*.

In the single heads the high-lighted features stand out almost startlingly from the bed of dark, although as the eye searches the canvas, the shadows gradually give back a rich though muted accompaniment of detail. The golden browns and yellows and darkened reds are opulently varied yet blended. In the larger canvases the main composition forms a pattern of related lights on the dark ground with half illumined figures and touched edges of drapery or jewels or wall affording contrapuntal enrichment.

Rembrandt's lighting is artificial and forced, say some literalists. But the forcing has added measurably to the expressiveness of his canvases. They are rendered dramatically vivid, they are thus given unity, coherence, and emphasis. The thick shadowing is Rembrandt's method of suppressing the detail that appears in nature but is unimportant or destructive in a picture. It permits him to stress the essential in subject even while providing a sensuous glow and splendour.

As draughtsman in line too he is the outstanding master of Western art. His drawings are tense, economical, richly expressive. In that purest of the linear arts, etching—where the line is traced with a needle-point—his achievement is unsurpassed.

At twenty-two he had already proved himself a master of etching. A portrait of his mother dated 1628 is one of the prints most sought after by collectors. From the "pure etching" method used to achieve this trifle, two and one-half inches square, he went on to extend the boundaries of the art until it encompassed effects of tonal contrasts of massed lights and darks not before considered possible to the medium in plates measured in feet. Nor has any one since his time matched in etching the impressiveness and sheer pictorial brilliancy and grandeur of the *Hundred Guilder Print*—so named because the unprecedented price struck the popular imagination—or *The*



Rembrandt *Christ Healing the Sick* "The Hundred-Guilder Print" Etching  
[Courtesy Knoedler Galleries]

*Three Crosses* These mark a climax in black-and-white picturing not less notable than Dürer's achievement in engraving or Hokusai's in brush-drawing

Rembrandt's method is more individualistic than is usual among the great masters. He stands apart from his school, from the painters of his own nation—whereas Giotto, Titian, and even Michelangelo fit into some traceable sequence of preparation, culmination, and decline within a phase of art. Rembrandt has no notable follower, as he had no important predecessor.

In this fact the historians have found reason for a broad generalization. Rembrandt is the first true modern of painting, because he is the earliest great individualist. From this time on, schools of painting will be feeble, comparatively indeterminate. Individual genius and independence from tradition will count more. A roll-call of the great names of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries supports the thesis: Goya, Daumier, Cezanne, Blake, Turner—these are names outside the clear paths of tradition and expectation. Goya alone might be fitted into a national and traditional reason for

being, but he too is independent of most of the historical Spanish traits

Rembrandt the individual was Rembrandt passionately devoted to his art, absorbed in its problems, neglectful of all that failed to touch vitally the work he was doing. He was not heedless of what other artists had done. He studied diligently the pictures of the great Italians. Although little given to reading, he had his copy of Dürer's treatise on perspective. But in general his approach to painting was exceptionally personal and his solutions were unique.

The artists who come after Rembrandt, and those who are his contemporaries, are sometimes called the "Little Dutchmen." It is not only that their talents are small as compared with those of the one master, but that they specialized in painting little things and little effects. The literally little things include children and dogs and vegetables and milk jugs. The little effects are those of cunningly lighted interiors, photographically detailed, of a windmill against a grey sky, or of trees along a canal. The little incidents of family life, too, are pictured in endless variation: the doctor's visit, the writing of a letter, the music lesson, cooking dinner.

It is not that these subjects had never appeared in serious art before. On the contrary, masters had made them incidental to great painting again and again. But never had they been exploited for their own sake and with such loving care for detail. Never had familiar sentiment been so capitalized. Somehow painting itself, the instrument that had compassed Michelangelo's fugues and El Greco's symphonies, was brought down also to little methods, to miniature prettinesses, to petty purposes. Thus was genre painting—"scenes from ordinary life"—first popularized and brought to its own sort of perfection.

If the subjects and the medium are slight, the list of accomplished and popular painters is big out of all proportion. The museums are full of canvases by Brouwer and van Ostade, by Metsu and Maes, by ter Borch and Jan Steen, by de Hooch and Vermeer and Gerard Dou. It is not necessary, in tracing the main current in the world stream of art, to pause over each of these men, whatever their fame in schoolhouse and museum. Some never rose above a competent sort of illustration. Nicholas Maes catches something of Rembrandt's magical lighting, but uses it to less noble ends, and does not, on the other hand, arrive at the miniature mastery of ter Borch or Vermeer. Gabriel Metsu, also influenced by Rembrandt in his early years, went over to a distinctive type of middle-class genre picturing, with exceptional polish.





*De Hooch In the Pantry [Courtesy Royal Museum, Amsterdam]*

Peter de Hooch was one of the earliest of the Little Masters of Dutch interior painting. His household views with a few well-placed figures indicate a competent sort of surface composition. He could handle a subtle problem of natural lighting with the best of his fellows except Vermeer—from whom he learned something of the trick of it. More original in theme are his rare garden scenes detailed down to the last leaf on each tree, the last blossom on each bush.

Gerard ter Borch, better born and widely travelled, arrived at a miniature achievement which is sure and pleasing. During one of his several visits abroad he met Velazquez, and he doubtless absorbed something of the Spaniard's technique of thin-paint use and of pearly colouring. He learned to eliminate, too, a good many accessories and details that his contemporaries



Ter Borch *Boy Hunting Fleas* Alte Pinakothek, Munich  
 [Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

felt constrained to cling to—retained as part of the “truth” of household naturalism—so that his little pictures have an agreeable atmosphere of simplicity and coherent harmony. There is much to be enjoyed in his exquisite portraits and genre bits. *The Boy Hunting Fleas* is typically atmospheric and harmonious and exact.

Most prolific of the Little Dutchmen, and least likely to be himself, or his best self, through any considerable run of his paintings, Jan Steen is the eclectic of the group. His tavern scenes have long been favourites, his lively and crowded illustrations of lower-class home-life are faithfully instructive



*Vermeer Girl Reading Letter by a Window State Gallery Dresden*  
[Photo courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

and often amusing and he used to be considered the peer of ter Borch and Vermeer. But it is increasingly recognized that his gifts are those of a spirited illustrator. He could however imitate successfully some of the things his fellows were doing in fields farther from detailed anecdote telling. He is one of those who found capitalistic democracy unkind to art. He suffered hunger and went through bankruptcy and toward the end turned his house into a tavern as a means of keeping alive. His work is most uneven ranging from

exquisite domestic scenes to mediocre and commonplace depictions of trivial and sensational incident

It is Vermeer of Delft who transcends the others and lifts genre to a region of exquisite perfection. One of the lost and forgotten painters through several generations, he was rediscovered in the mid-nineteenth century, when the devotion of a French scholar brought his contribution to public attention and established him as painter of many works then ascribed to others. His reputation has grown steadily until today he stands second to Rembrandt alone, as a master among Holland's artists.

No one has equalled Vermeer's delicacy in handling natural light. He commonly places his figures, preferably single, in an enveloping crystal-clear atmosphere, softly but palely warm. He clears out the clutter of detail and accessory that destroys unity of effect in so many Dutch interiors, or rather he organizes the canvas into an arrangement of a few detailed units against cleared backgrounds. In the end it is arrangement that spells his success. He is master of arranged surface composition, expert in adjusting line and mass with balance and grace. He loves to play with texture as such, fixing all its appealing values, whether in a caressable skin or in clean linen, or glazed pottery or polished metals. Patterned stuffs, rugs and tablecloths and laces exquisitely reproduced, add incidental richness at just the right point. His colouring is harmonious, cool, and agreeable. But always the telling over of his virtues brings one back to contrived but apparently natural lighting.

These many perfections found today in Vermeer's canvases are, of course, fragily refined. They run toward the precious and the over-exquisite. It is not to deny his standing, which is at the very top in one miniature field of art, but only to restrain a too enthusiastic acceptance, that one points out the artist's total lack of imagination, and the exclusion of everything that will not fit within a single formula of rather shallow plastic composition.

Obviously the Dutch did not want painting that went deep, in either sense as subjective expression, or as abstract orchestration. As regards the surface thing which they liked, comprehensible at a glance, flatteringly familiar, admirably photographic, Vermeer is the perfect artist. His expressiveness goes farther than that: is inward in that his own method perfectly represents the clean Dutch ways, the bright polished neatness of the Dutch household, the tidy-mindedness and thrifty economy of the Hollanders. There is something choice, something sweet and fresh, about each of Vermeer's too rare canvases, as one meets them in the museums. A little flame



*Vermeer A Woman Weighing Gold*  
*Collection Joseph Widener, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania*

of joy leaps up as one recognizes, on the overcrowded walls, their delicate manner, their discreet touch, their pure atmosphere.

Landscape-painting had been developed in Flanders and Germany, and toyed with in Italy, and so is not an invention of the Dutch. But they were the first to glorify it, and place it among the foremost popular categories of art. Holland sees the first great school of landscapists, the earliest group of artists who devote themselves exclusively to the out-of-doors scene.



*Ruysdael The Great Cemetery State Gallery Dresden*  
 [Photo courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

instructive analysis first in the organizational elements the use of line and plane of volume and space of light and dark and of textures to create a firmly locked formal unity with full and varied counterplay of main and minor rhythms and second in the distilled feeling of cold and desolation of a tomblike sadness. Most popular and pleasing of course are the familiar broad landscapes filled with movement but beautifully calm which might so often be better called skyscapes so extensive an area is given to heaven and its masses of living moving clouds.

Ruysdael's talents were too powerful and too large for the public of his time. He too died in the poorhouse.

There are puzzling and curious aspects of the art history of Holland of the

There had been Dutch experimenters and pioneers, some time after the advances made by Patinir and Altdorfer and Brueghel Rembrandt did a few landscape canvases such as *The Mill* in the Widener Collection at Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, and the *Landscape with Obelisk* in the Gardner Museum Boston, which have more vigour and largeness than any by the later Dutch specialists Before him had been one Hercules Seghers, who is credited with teaching Rembrandt something of etching and of landscape composition

But it is the group of specializing painters somewhat younger than Rembrandt who constitute the so-called Dutch landscape school Albert Cuyp Paul Potter, Philip Wouwerman, Adrian van de Velde, Jan van Goyen, Meindert Hobbema, and Jacob van Ruisdael Not one of these but was competent to represent an observed interesting landscape truthfully and even attractively But Ruisdael does a great deal more

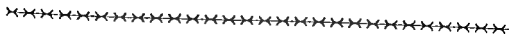
Van Goyen had brought to the outdoor scene something of the quality or element that Vermeer had added to interior views arrangement For all the natural "look" of his picture, it is found upon analysis to have gained by an adjustment of parts that is artificial, an augmentation out of his reasoned or intuitive grasp of abstract composition Ruisdael has the sense of arrangement, and he adds a richness or fullness of expression that lifts him above all his fellows

Hobbema, for instance, has a good eye for well-balanced bits in nature, an alley of trees centred between diversified fields and buildings, or a group of houses in an island of trees between river and road But there is this difference one feels that Hobbema has *found* picturesque materials and faithfully transcribed them, whereas Ruisdael is able to create them

With the latter the materials are nature's and Holland's, but the compositional garment is Ruisdael's There is a communication of felt mood and character, too The atmosphere of a wet sky and drenched field, or the strange subdued-brilliant light from a sun just setting, or a vapour-softened marshland is delicately conveyed

Uneven in his work, occasionally attempting more than he could compass, changing over to a less congenial but fashionable style toward the end, when neglected and in want, he left many unimportant canvases But there is a sufficiently large body of superior pictures, marked by his special amplitude and his atmospheric felicity, based on a good grasp of abstract order, to warrant his rank with the earliest true masters of the landscape In *The Jewish Cemetery*, for instance, a student may find exceptional materials for

## CHAPTER XXIV



### *France and the International Baroque Art*

FRANCE was disunited and torn with wars in those decades during which the van Eycks were, with almost incredible swiftness, emancipating Northern art from its medieval fetters, and establishing realism as painting's normal mode of expression in Europe. At the same time Masaccio and his fellows and followers in Florence were initiating the scientific reforms which were to provide a bridge from primitive formalism to representation in accordance with "the modern vision." France, geographically between these pioneering and originating nations, was then busy fighting, and recuperating to fight again. This is the explanation of the centuries of artistic impotence between the era of Romanesque and Gothic art and the appearance of the French school in the seventeenth century.

The work done by the French courts and armies after the Gothic period was not without influence upon the arts. The feudal lords were then put down, the bourgeoisie emerged as a power but was reconciled to the most ornamental monarchy in Western history, and the machinery was established for standardizing the crafts styles internationally. But no great art came out of France in the period 1350-1600.

Those were the greatest centuries of the painting art in Europe. The fourteenth century belonged to Siena and Giotto, the fifteenth to Florence and Flanders, the sixteenth saw the brief rise of Germany's star, and the glory of the Venetian school and of El Greco in Spain. The seventeenth too will see greater names than those of France. Rembrandt and Rubens, even Velazquez and Van Dyck. If one presses, for France, the names of Poussin and Claude Lorrain, magnifying their stature, there is certain to be the rejoinder that both were lifelong expatriates, and that Lorrain was more German than French in all respects. Nevertheless, with them the true French tradition





*Pieta* Ascribed to an unknown painter of the school of Avignon  
Collection Helen Clay Frick, New York [Photo courtesy Frick Art Reference Library]

And indeed when France is fairly established as an originating nation, the keynote of its first gift to the world is courtliness. Witness the opera houses and ballets and tapestries as well as Watteau's bonbon-box painting. Of course there is a counter-current of revived 'classical' art too. But artistic France, up to the Revolution is essentially monarchical, concerned with a baroque decorativeness. The influence is on the side of an insubstantial fashionable courtiers' playtime art.

When a pope made Avignon the official residence of the Holy See, abandoning a too disorderly and discredited Rome in 1305, he built a palace in the Provençal city and of course wanted the latest adornments for it. Among the artists called from Italy to decorate its walls was no less a figure than Simone Martini of Siena. Thus was introduced an influence colourful, rhythmic and graceful. France had of course its schools of miniaturists, but when a French

begins, although it will be the mid-eighteenth century before European art leadership fully returns to France. It will be exercised for a time to spread a courtly sort of art that is the least profound and least honest of the European international styles. Only in the nineteenth century will the nation's genius be soundly and creatively world-influencing. Then the French will become first among Western peoples.

In short, France disappears from the story of art as the Gothic spirit fades, and is heard from only in minor channels through three centuries, establishes a sort of ornamental leadership in the era of Versailles court grandeur, and true creative leadership after the Revolution.

At one moment during the Flemish advance—sometimes counted by French historians a French movement—Flanders and its art had almost fallen into the lap of Paris. But Philip the Hardy, himself a prince of the true house of France, the Valois, having become Duke of Burgundy and married Marguerite of Flanders, turned enemy to his brother, the French king, just when signs pointed to a renaissance for the united nation—a renaissance that could only have had a strong Flemish stamp. In any case the Burgundian dukes continued to take Flemish artists to the capital at Dijon from the vice-capital at Bruges, whereas the rest of France was plunged into devastating warfare.

The start made by the King of France and a third brother—the Duke of Berry, toward a court fostered art was brief-lived. Civil war, then the defeats at the hands of the English, shattered all stability. Aside from the school of Burgundy there persisted only some small effort in Provence and Touraine, where a primitive tradition survived. This gave way to a school of miniature-realistic portraiture which is of interest which has its little masters but which remains without international significance.

When the country is truly united late in the fifteenth century, the court turns for culture to the South, and it is a pale reflection of Italian Renaissance art that then guides French taste. So Italianate is the following century that all the chief names are of French artists resident in Italy or of Italian artists imported to Fontainebleau, Paris and Versailles. It is France's adaptation of Italian Renaissance and baroque forms that determines the national style when finally Louis XIV. decides to make Paris the art capital of the world, and begins to send out the courtly rococo influence to every great kingdom or petty duchy of Europe.



*Pietà* Ascribed to an unknown painter of the school of Avignon. Collection Helen Clay Frick, New York [Photo, courtesy Frick Art Reference Library]

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type of primitive painting appears, it is marked by characteristics not a little reminiscent of the Sieneſe

The preſent-day knowledge of French primitive artiſts is defective. There is a ſchool of Avignon—beſt repreſented by the famous *Pietà* in the Louvre—which exhibits typical Northern traits along with certain of the Italian idioms. And there are ſcattered panels known as Franco-Italian which are among the moſt intriguing of late mediæval paintings. A characteristic work is the *Pietà* which is to be ſeen in two verſions, with and without the donor, in the Frick Collection, New York. In this as in the Louvre panel it is fairly eaſy to detect ſomething Gothic, certainly ſome quality that is not to be found in the graceful Sieneſe pictures. The transition in Italy had been direct from Byzantine to the linear melodies and ſunny colourfulneſs of Duccio. In the panels typically French—though the phrase may not be wholly warranted—there is a ſtiffer or more angular effect that is eſſentially French Gothic. Even the Cologne primitives are nearer the Italian ſtandard type.

There are fugitive examples in France of nearly every transitional mode, and ſome ſtrange hybrid things beſides. There are pictures reſulting, apparently, when the makers of miniatures have ſeen and admired a Sieneſe maſterpiece, or, a little later, a Flemish oil-painted panel. There is a Maſter of Moulins whoſe works are nearer to the German type, or perhaps like the German, ſtrongly influenced by the Flemings. Artiſts of the ſo-called ſchool of Provence, on the other hand, ſuggeſt Italian affiliations.

Of named artiſts not far from the old formalism but already aware of the van Eyckian ſearch for exactneſs of ſtatement, Malouel is moſt notable. He had gone from Flanders to the Burgundian capital, but if the attributed *Madonna and Child* is really his, or the panel, *God with the Virgin and St John Weeping over the Body of Jeſus*, in the Louvre, then one may know that he has taken a direction away from the Northerners—his own, or poſſibly one to be ſign-poſted as French.

One of the earlieſt named painters is Enguerrand Charonton, who did a panoramic altarpiece for the Church of the Chartreux at Villeneuve-leſ-Avignon in 1453—a marvellouſly mixed work, perhaps becauſe the artiſt and his aſſiſtants divided up the ſeveral parts. There are unmiſtakable Italian influences apparent in the Heaven portion, ſhowing the Virgin being crowned, and ſigns of Flemish exactitude in the view of Rome (which is depicted as a Northern mediæval city) and in the hoſts of leſſer figures. There are fascinating bits in the painting, but what is exceptionally inſtructive, as indicating the



*Madonna and Child* Ascribed to Jean Malouel

artist's way of working at this time, is the extant contract between the wealthy patron-donor and Charonton. The document binds the painter to deliver an altarpiece upon which "first there shall be the representation of Paradise and in this Paradise shall be the Holy Trinity." It goes on thus (in the translation by Guy Eglington)

And between Father and Son shall be no difference, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, and Our Lady, before Item By the side of Our Lady shall be the angel Gabriel with a certain number of angels, and on the other side Saint Michael with such number of angels as shall seem best to the said master Enguerrand. Item: on the other hand Saint John the Baptist with other patriarchs and prophets . . .

Item: after the heavens the earth, of which shall be shown a portion of the city of Rome Item on the side of the setting sun shall be the form of the Church of Saint Peter of Rome, and the front of the said church at the portal has a cone of copper



*Madonna and Child School of Avignon, 14th century*  
 [Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

and ilex, [whence] one descends by great steps into a large square leading to the bridge Sant' Angelo Item on the left side of the said square is a portion of the wall of Rome and on the other side are houses and shops of all manner of men, at the end of the said square is the castle of Sant' Angelo and a bridge over the Tiber which is in the city of Rome Item on the left side will be Hell and on the side of Hell will be a greatly deformed devil on the mountan, turning his back on the angel and lying in wait for certain souls in Hell, which, by other devils, are driven toward him Item in Purgatory and Hell will be souls of every estate according to the judgment of the said Master Enguerrand Item the said master Enguerrand shall use all his science in the Holy Trinity and the Blessed Virgin, and the rest according to his conscience

And so on, through many paragraphs itemizing subject-matter. Even the colours, which might otherwise not be up to first quality for lustre and permanence, are specified.

It is Jean Fouquet, however, who is commonly marked as the first sig-



*Boy Prays g Anonymous*

nificant French painter. He combines the influences—is known to have visited Italy and worked side by side with imported Flemish miniaturists—yet has distinctive qualities of sensitivity and tasteful objectivity which are not quite attained elsewhere. He is an illustrator of course, as are all the French and Flemings in this mid fifteenth century, as will be most of the Italians within a generation or so. But he brings a moderately expert understanding of plastic organization to his pictures, whether still actual manuscript illustrations or larger panels. He is not far behind the van Eycks and Dirk Bouts in exploration of the outdoor scene for background effects: the landscape of the *St. Marguerite* in the Book of Hours of Etienne Chevalier is already landscape



Fouquet *Virgin and Child* Detail [Courtesy Antwerp Museum]

not only well observed but attractively realized (The so-called French landscape school will stem from another growth entirely, some generations later)

But it is as a portraitist that Fouquet particularly scores. *The Portrait of an Unknown Man* in the Lichtenstein Gallery, Vienna is one of the best, recommended by its very simplicity and its utter honesty of statement. Some prefer the *Charles VII* in the Louvre as more characterful. It is when Fouquet leaves straightforward documentation that he betrays his limitations as a picture-maker. The famous *Virgin and Child* at Antwerp is but badly served, formally, by the background cherubs (which nicely fill one side of the canvas but let the



*Diane de Poitiers* Ascribed to François Clouet [Courtesy Worcester Art Museum]

eye slip off the edge at the other) The Virgin nevertheless is beautifully done, perhaps because it is a portrait—a likeness—it is said, of Agnès Sorel the actress and mistress of King Charles VII

Any roomful of early French pictures will show how Fouquet's work led to the portraiture of the elder Clouet, in the next generation and of his son or sons in the next. France was portrait-mad at this time. There are 341 portraits listed among the effects left by Catherine de' Medici, queen of Henry II, at her

death in 1589. Miniatures and enamels were fashionable as well as the Clouet type of painting. Enamelling, for many centuries a French art centred at Limoges, may be put down indeed as a source of some of the qualities realized by Fouquet and his followers.

Jean Clouet, the father, probably from Brussels, was an excellent draughtsman and he knew how to frame up a bust or half-figure effectively, although, like most of the middle-period Flemings, he was likely to destroy concentration of interest by his too-scrupulous attention to detail in all corners. Such portraits as the *William of Montmorency* at Lyons or the attributed *Elizabeth of Austria* in the Louvre are individually rewarding to study. The gallery of Clouet likenesses affords an extraordinary record of the people of courtly France at this time.

If the names of the Clouets and of Corneille de Lyon occur surprisingly often on museum walls and in private collections, it is because something like a portrait factory was organized to exploit both the products and the trademarks with many artists as assistants. Jean Clouet and his son François are less concerned with the very small portraits (which are not quite small enough to be, technically, miniatures). They are rather the specialty of Corneille de Lyon. The beautifully finished little plaques from his hand (and those of what assistants we know not) approach the richness of the contemporary enamels, and provide one of the very pleasurable spots in an otherwise arid period.

There is, no doubt, some little influence from the world-popular Holbein upon the later developments under the names of Clouet and Corneille de Lyon, in sensitive and expressive use of line, and in a method of paling facial shadows to give a blond aspect to the flesh areas, these being further brought into contrast by near-by masses of black. But the Frenchmen are little masters in their own right.

France at the time of the Clouets was, of course, artistically provincial. To the northward the later group of Flemings was again breaking new ground, with at least one world master in Brueghel. The Germans were completing their half-century of distinctive achievement. In Italy Michelangelo had capped the progress of Florence and Rome, and the school of Venice was entering upon its most glorious period. The French king and courtiers recognized Italy as the new fountain of culture. They patronized their own portrait-makers, but portraiture seemed a tame display when placed beside the great pictures of the Italians. There began, about 1530, a process of borrow-



*Corneille de Lyon: A Nobleman*

*[Courtesy John G. Johnson Art Collection, Philadelphia]*

ing, based on a recognition of cultural inferiority, that was to mean within a century the complete Italianization of French art.

France in troubled days had entertained Italian masters. Leonardo da Vinci, then an old man, had accepted the invitation of Francis I to take up residence at Amboise near Blois, in 1516, but rather promptly died there. Andrea del Sarto had served the same monarch briefly too; served him ill, incidentally, since he took back to Florence a purse of money and failed to deliver paintings as agreed. Later Benvenuto Cellini was to visit the Northern court.

But the story of French art as such is bound up rather with the lesser Italians who became fixtures in France, and with two Frenchmen who (this was a little later, after 1600) went to Italy to spend their working life. The

most important of the artists who were bought and brought was Francesco Primaticcio, a decorator who represented the run-out Florentine tradition, or the new Bolognese extension of it. He and his associates and assistants set up a veritable Italian island in the heart of France, at Fontainebleau.

There are no important works surviving, nor any names worth remembering, from the school of Fontainebleau. But it is well to note that in the unself-reliant French court there was established, in the fifteen-thirties, this centre of influence, and actual examples of Italian grand-manner ornamentation. All the later Renaissance mannerisms and devices are demonstrated by Italians who soon call themselves Frenchmen, and by the French artists who gather round and imitate them. And it all has a bearing on what will be French taste and a French style one hundred and fifty years later.

Architecture responds almost immediately, and so does the art of the theatre, but painting retrogresses, becomes the strange mixed thing which is perhaps to be expected when a frozen classicism crosses with sensuality and love of display. The paganism of glorified nudity is perfectly to the taste of the triflers of the court, is fitted to express the special society for which art is now set to work. But the academic grandeur and the habit of veiling realism behind mythological allegory hinder formation of any real style. A borrowed rhetoric prevails.

In exception, there is a freshness about the anonymous *Flora and Attendants* which lifts it above Bolognese posed and forced monumentalism. Almost it suggests a possible happy meeting of Italian rhythmic lyricism and the Fouquet-Clouet sort of cleanness and polish. But it is a very rare sort of exception.

The school of Fontainebleau, then, is to be counted no more than preparation and fertilization. But of the Frenchmen who went to Italy to study, and stayed, one, Nicolas Poussin, is successful in establishing a way of art that will be picked up by later generations and made basic to a French tradition. That Poussin had something creative to give is proven, perhaps, by his success in adding a significance to the late Florentine-Roman classicism when the Italians themselves were finding it only a road to futility and emptiness.

Poussin turns out in the end to be always a trifle hard, his effects calculated, his approach intellectual. But over in the field at the far pole from intuitively felt, spontaneous, and emotional painting, over where rationalism and intellect control, he is nearly supreme. He has studied, obviously, Raphael and



Poussin *Baptism Bridge over the House* London  
[By permission of the Earl of Ellesmere]

the antique statues and Domenichino. He puts together several derived manners—but emerges with one of his own. Beneath the manner is something most unusual in this seventeenth century: a calculated display of pictorial structure. There is mathematical distribution of parts, a play and counterplay of balanced weights, of arranged planes, of answering lights. Once one gets over the obvious unreality, the too scholarly artificiality, one's eye begins to find a subtly rhythmic order in the compositions. The volumes, planes, and textures, the chiaroscuro and the sparing colour, are orchestrated cunningly and with great sureness.

Poussin is almost the only artist successful in just this way. He permits himself to become a slave to classic notions of purity, grandeur, and remoteness; yet he goes on to capture a large measure of plastic aliveness, of melodious movement. His canvases ought, by evidence of one's first glance, to be as empty and dead as those of Giulio Romano or Anton Raphael Mengs, and observers enough still dismiss them as static, cold, and pedantic. But with the modern sharpening of the eye for abstract rhythms and plastic order, new

recognition has come to the expatriate Frenchman. His orchestration, to be sure, never carries him near the grand formal effects of a Michelangelo or an El Greco, but in his own shy and restrained way he is a structural master.

The scholarly Poussin did not find the France of his day congenial and he spent his life in Rome. The painters still in the run-out tradition of the school of Fontainebleau were carrying on what they thought to be the true expression of neo-classicism, modified further toward the sensual and the magnificent by the conditions of royal living, in which courtesans and their affairs had undue weight. At the same moment Poussin away in Rome was developing this other classicism, with its sound architectural foundation, which may be called typically French because the essence of it is to appear again and again in the French non-courtly painters—most notably in Chardin, in the classicists who react toward purity and sound structure in the era of the Revolution in Ingres, and finally in France's foremost painter, Cézanne, upon whose work a world revolution in art will turn.

If Poussin faintly chills—with his tombs and ruins, his long-dead Greek philosophers, over-delicate pastoral shepherdesses, too-literary legends, and his rather colourless method—one yet may enjoy his sure slight melody, and know that here the French tradition is at last established. He initiates a pictorial discipline which is definitely national.

The men of Poussin's generation or slightly after—except Claude, of whom more in a moment—are almost negligible, though Lesueur is treated seriously in most of the books, even those discriminating between art and national painting activity. He was honestly rather than displayfully classical, but he departed from the colder methods to gain something out of his own warm sympathy for the life around him. A simple and plain man, son of a carpenter and father of a grocer, he was unpretentious and content with his small triumphs. It may seem strange, considering his predilection for classic and religious subjects and his low station, but he had a quality of airy grace in painting which contains more than a hint of the Watteau-Boucher prettiness of two generations later.

At the same time a wave of Low Country naturalism again swept France. Best known among the practitioners were the three Le Nain brothers, whose popular works are scenes of peasant life, done with Dutch honesty but without the redeeming delicacy and compositional consistency of a ter Borch or a Vermeer. At the other extreme of method and interest was Charles Le Brun, grandiloquent, soft, facile, and decorative. His paintings are less significant to





Poussin *Orpheus and Eurydice* Louvre  
 [Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

us today than is the fact that he was the first head of the Academy and thus connected with an institution that has been considered almost continually a bulwark of anti-art

Claude Gelee remains an authentic figure whether for pure enjoyment or because of his place as initiator. Un-French except by accident of birth, he nevertheless is commonly counted as in the French tradition, even as an originator of it. He seems to have left his birthplace in the border province of Lorraine, whence the name Claude Lorrain by which he is commonly known, at the age of twelve, to live with a brother in Germany. He later went to Italy and eventually made Rome his permanent place of residence. He not only never visited Paris and the courts but probably never set foot in any part of France except Lorraine. His teachers and his companions too were Italian and German. Yet his work is French, partly by reason of some quality more Gallic than anything else, partly because, with Poussin's, his example led directly to a French "picturesque landscape" current and influenced scattered painters from the dry Hubert Robert and the courtly Watteau to the Barbizon landscapists and the impressionists.

Claude Lorrain bridged, so to speak, from classicism to observed open air



Claude Lorrain *Marriage of Isaac and Rebecca* [Courtesy National Gallery, London]

realism. His classicism is incidental rather than fundamental at times is a none-too-fitting ornamentation, at other times a specious affectation. It consists, on that side, of introduced goddesses and shepherdesses, of antique ruins and Greek statues and urns. But in his work too are a calm, a discipline, and a rational structure which are over on the classic side. Claude's greatest service to art, however, lies in the discovery by him of the out-of-doors as subject-matter, and an advance in atmospheric lighting. He puts the sun, the glamorous Southern sun, to work with effect. Like Poussin—and all would be futile without it—he expertly uses pictorial architecture, arranged structure, though apparently by instinctive grasp rather than with forethought.

Altogether this limited and—they say—downright ignorant man, who oftener than not hired someone else to paint in the figures of his landscapes because he could not manage them correctly, pushed forward the art of painted views, in the South, much as the Hollanders were doing, during his lifetime, in the North.



Claude Lorrain *Landscape with a Piping Shepherd*  
 [Courtesy William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City]

The art of Poussin and of Claude is a meaty episode in a tale thin and un-nutritious. Claude was born in 1600, and his working period is two centuries later than Fouquet's—and what a dearth of names between! After the two Roman Frenchmen there is another empty period. French art will reappear importantly at the court of Louis XIV, about 1700. But it will then be seen to have one root not indicated in either the false classicism of the Fontainebleau episode or the real classicism developed in the South; nor again in any of those minor manifestations, Clouet miniature portraiture or Le Nain genre or Le Brun academism. It is introduced into France by a celebrated internationalist who is a favourite at all the great courts of Europe in this century—Rubens. Since there is just here a natural pause in the French story, opportunity is afforded to go back and inquire into the phenomenon of the baroque style, which alone can explain Rubens, and the later French art of Watteau and Fragonard.



Claude Lorrain: *Marriage of Isaac and Rebekka* [Courtesy National Gallery, London]

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Rubens more often than any other eminent painter confines within his pictures a great deal of nervous movement, of fluttering light, of interweaving curved lines and sinuous forms. He is at the far pole from classic repose, clarity, and horizontality. He is the typical baroque painter.

Baroque, as a style, developed first in architecture, not painting. It followed upon the disintegration of Renaissance neo-classic architecture. While there is no consistent logic in the Italian version of classic building design, it had been marked, under Bramante and Palladio and Vignola, by strict laws governing the design and placing of ornamental features, particularly columns and capitals, pediments and cornices. The logical structural reason for these elements was gone, but they at least pretended to a certain functional look and position. One illogic breeds another, and builders without academic reverence for Vitruvian rules began to mix the ornaments, to tamper with the severe classic outlines and the traditionally fixed detail. Soon they were twisting the columns, bulging out the straight silhouette, wreathing the capitals with garlands. They broke the pediments at the centre to admit statues, and they piled up heaps of mixed ornamentation at every likely transition point or terminal.

Under most baroque architectural envelopes there persist classic outlines, marked by pilasters and columns, by grouped windows and arch-of-triumph doorways, by cornices and string courses. But every shred of the original Greek horizontal repose and mathematical clarity has disappeared. The building is restless, loaded, self-proclaimingly dressed up.

It is possible that even the better minds among Italian architects recognized that they had rigged up only a cold and too little expressive thing in the standard Rome-derived Renaissance building. The avowed purist Palladio had recombined the classic forms, putting large and small columns side by side, and multiplying cornices and balustrades. Sansovino further enriched façades with wreathings and intricately sculptured panels and rows of crowning statues, although he kept the building's divisions and outlines clear. All this led to a more theatrical and unconsidered straining after magnificent effect, after variety and profusion. Soon parts were swelling out like over-ripe fruit. Severity of outline gave place to broken silhouette. Opulent, even frivolous streamers of ornament clambered over every available foot of wall space. The style had got out of hand.

This is not to say that baroque design is all over-blown or tortured. A few architects—then sculptors, then painters—recognized a certain fitness in the

## A Regal Style



Church of Santa Maria della Salute, Venice

curved line and the swelling form, an appropriateness to the  
of king and bishop, and they saw a chance to dramatize  
in their own way. They measurably tamed the style and  
and a few palaces that please the discriminating eye, also  
sculpture—and Rubens's painting.

The name baroque—which seems to have the very look  
tion in it—is as difficult to trace to an origin as is the

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been derived from the Portuguese *barocco*, defining a pearl irregularly shaped or it may be traced to the Italian *terrica*, "wart", or, again, to the Greek *baros*, "heavy." All three ideas, irregularity, wartiness, heaviness, seem to belong to the architectural manifestation.

Of church exteriors the most celebrated in the style is Santa Maria della Salute in Venice. The main portal is the Roman triumphal arch, the dome emerges fairly clear as the Renaissance type thing and there is the standard assortment of classic pilasters, pediments, cornices, and balustrades. But what a jumble, all the way up to the drum of the dome! How illogical, how unfunctional! Yet somehow, how beautiful! For the pile has *great* beauty when seen from a distance—though the glamorous Grand Canal has something to do with it.

The baroque style was adopted by the Jesuits of the Counter-Reformation—perhaps for no better reason than that the more liberal or licentious popes had encouraged the contrasting earlier Renaissance building. So it pushed especially into Spain, where more good façades in the style are to be seen than in any other country. It developed there into a special form known as the Churrigueresque, so named because the architect Jose de Churriguera had introduced the mode into Spain. It is characterized by inordinately enriched doorways and pediments and towers. The manner travelled to the Spanish colonies and is to be found, in examples not unpleasing, in Mexico and South America.

In many European church interiors today one may trace just how the original Gothic structure was modified or refitted when the Renaissance influence was felt, how, then, the baroque wave followed, with the introduction of a third crop of architectural or decorative features. In Bavaria, Tirol and Switzerland there are churches consistently in the baroque style, gorgeously if not overwhelmingly decorative. Salzburg is particularly proud of its baroque monuments and many an out-of-the-way Tirolean village has monasteries and chapels generously adorned in the fashion.

The baroque obviously was a style for palaces. There are examples scattered from the originating point in Rome (some say Naples) to Germany and even Russia and Sweden. It is no surprise to find Italian architects—like Italian stage decorators—invited to distant courts to design this or that palace or opera house or pavilion. France too was importing the Southern builders in the sixteenth century, and already had native architects who had taken





Bernini *Ecstasy of Santa Theresa* Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome  
 [Photo, courtesy Italian Tourist Information Office]

up the new fashion. The west pavilion of the Louvre, by Pierre Lescot, finished about 1560, is accounted a world masterpiece of baroque design.

Today's architects, now that they are returning to a structural basis, rather than a decorative, for their art, begin to claim that baroque design was no architectural style at all; that rather it was what a group of decorative sculptors evolved when they mistakenly thought they were architects. Indeed, baroque is more a style of ornament, or decoration, than a mode of building. Yet nothing could be farther from the basic idea of glyptic sculpture.



Rubens *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* Alte Pinakothek Munich  
[Photo, courtesy German Railroads Information Office]

Born in Germany in 1577 of Flemish parents temporarily exiled Peter Paul Rubens was brought up in Antwerp and at the early age of twenty-one became a member of the guild of painters there. But the call of Italy was strong among Low Country artists and two years later Rubens was studying the Venetian masters in their own city and soon after became court painter to the Duke of Mantua. He undertook diplomatic missions for his master, going to Florence and again as far abroad as Madrid. He was soon the great

internationalist of art, speaking eight languages and travelling from country to country, from court to court

Antwerp, however, became again his home, and he is generally accounted as belonging to the Flemish school, but it is to be noted that he built himself an Italian palace there. Trained by the Jesuits, he furthered the identification of baroque art with the Catholic Counter-Reformation, and particularly with the spread of baroque church architecture in Spain (Some authorities describe Rubens as essentially a Spanish painter, a certain justification lies in the fact that Flanders at this time still belonged to the Spanish crown)

Seldom has an artist been more industrious—he rose at five o'clock every morning—and never did a painter turn out a greater acreage of canvases. To ascribe all to Rubens's hand exclusively would be patently rash. As a matter of fact he is known to have had a horde of assistants, who often would paint in a complete picture from the master's sketch, to be merely retouched by his hand. The method accounts for the great unevenness in the canvases passing as his work. Nor can any one be sure how much in a competent or even beautiful piece may be by such a talented assistant as Van Dyck. Nevertheless, there can be no serious questioning of Rubens's surpassing talent as a monumental and vigorous decorator. He is also a masterly portraitist—in the range just below Titian and El Greco—and upon occasion a very fine landscapist.

If one's taste runs to the magnificent and the exuberant, one may choose Rubens as first among painters. For soberer tastes and more reposeful enjoyment he is inferior to a dozen other masters. There are delicate minded women who simply cannot endure being in a room with his pictures partly because of the clash and turbulence of his diagonal method, but oftener because of the sensuality of his over fleshly nudes. His colour is often disturbing, seldom soothing or even harmoniously co-ordinated. Nor is he always able to distinguish the dramatic form from the melodramatic. At the age of fifty-three Rubens married one Helen Fourment, who, although only sixteen years old, was very plump, even opulently womanly, and thenceforward even his Madonnas had the physical roundness which proves disturbing to fastidious observers.

In the balance on the other side may be placed a genius for monumental vigour and extraordinary animation. Many of his pictures are superbly spirited. In the best of them he confined the strong movement within a planned compositional structure amply justifying the dynamic power and the overflowing abundance of materials.

Titian *Rape of Europa*

[Courtesy Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston]

Rubens is the greatest of the painters who lived contented in the physical realm, without intimations of mystic forces beyond the seeable world, without attempting poetic overtones or spiritual communication. He is earthy, virile, invigorating. His *joie de vivre* is contagious and compelling. There is great surface richness too.

But to return to the baroque in his art he had grasped during his long stay in Italy the essential nervous movement of it, and the profuse ornamentalism. Although he all but banished line as such in his later phase, the curved line as contour is his mainstay. The diagonal composition is in the great figure-pieces, sometimes even in the landscapes and portraits.

This art capitalizing movement to a degree unprecedented was demonstrated by Rubens at Madrid, at Paris, at London. Marie de' Medici of France



*Rubens Coronation of Marie de' Medici Louvre*

had herself immortalized in a series of twenty-one panels from Rubens's hand. The flamboyant series is now in the Louvre. A baroque object lesson was thus set up at the very heart of French court life. In Madrid it was Rubens who insisted that Velazquez get rid of his provincialism by studying in Italy, but, Velazquez himself prudently returned to Titian after a time, although the baroque fashion proved just the dish for the lesser Spanish illustrator-painters. Whether Rubens actually brought about the fluttering weakness of British portrait-painting is open to question, but the faults are of his kind, display, dispersion of volumes, over-nervous or over-loose composition.

In Antwerp itself some closer followers definitely aped the master. One, Jacob Jordaens, carried the sensual note and the dashing sinuous technique to a further extreme. The celebrated *Feamidity* from his brush is opulent and seductively brilliant, but one seems to see the virtuoso behind it. David Teniers the Younger, of the generation after Rubens, and last of the usually named Flemings, had no talent for grandeur. He took what of the looser movement and animation he could assimilate to his intimate pictures of tavern life and peasants dancing.

Van Dyck, a second Fleming who became an international figure, was as



Jordaens *Fecundity* [Courtesy Brussels Museum]

a youth closely associated with Rubens, entering the latter's studio as pupil and staying as assistant. But he early shook off the more extreme mannerisms of the baroque. He learned a great deal from Titian's works—he is not notable as an initiator—and he went on to be an agreeable and exceedingly popular portraitist. He was a born courtier, and he worked almost entirely among aristocrats and princes. After five years in Italy and four in his native Antwerp, he was called to be court painter to King Charles I of England, and spent the next nine years labouring to keep up with the ever-increasing orders for portraits. He died of overwork, or at least over-exertion, leaving a great number of mediocre canvases and a few excellent ones.

His finer portraits are solid, restrained, and graceful. From the charming *Marchesa Cattaneo* or the sober *Cornelius van der Geest*, both in the National Gallery, London, one would never infer that Van Dyck had worked in the baroque tradition. But the *James Stuart* in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, fluent, opulent, and superficially brilliant, slips over into the manner-



Van Dyck *James Stuart, Duke of Lennox* [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

isms of the style. It is this type of thing that leads on to the courtly art of Reynolds and Gainsborough, and certainly to Lawrence. The best of Van Dyck seems to lie in the other direction, in the territory least touched by Rubens's influence, though the young man so perfectly imitated the master at one period that certain of his canvases may be taken at first glance for the master's.

There was no great successor to Rubens. It may almost be said that there



Van Dyck *Cornelius van der Geest* [Courtesy National Gallery, London]





Magnasco *Arcadian Landscape* [Courtesy Art Institute, Chicago]

is no other first-rate baroque painter in history. Delacroix, the romanticist, was to attempt to found a school upon Rubens's methods two centuries later, unsuccessfully. In Italy, Tiepolo made superficially brilliant use of the swirl and the billowed forms (and did an occasional solid picture too), but he goes back rather to a separate lineage, in which Veronese is important.

Although a horde of Italian painters answered the call of Bernini, who laid out vast plans for decorating the Jesuit churches, and for palaces, few were other than misled by the passion for movement and show. They ended in theatricality. One cannot overlook, as an exception, Alessandro Magnasco, whose canvases, as one comes upon them rarely in museums, give back a definite and quiet pleasure. He tamed the baroque style, achieved an individualistic interpretation of its diagonal-accents composition and brilliantly staccato handling. The *Arcadian Landscape* at Chicago illustrates his method of patterning by highlights, with generous use of dark masses for contrast.

It was, then, the *spirit* of baroque rather than the individualistic Rubens technique that lived on, to transform French painting at the end of the century, and then English painting. Perhaps without the background of court display, of the taste for brilliant make-believe living, the light spirit of it might have died within a generation. But France was on the verge of the most glittering exhibition of courtly manners and artificial culture in Western history, and the mannerisms of decadent baroque, and the titillating superficial play of it, were precisely to the taste of fop and courtesan. Watteau caught, in the small, the sense of surface movement, the nervous vibration, and the loose structure. Even earlier Largillière and Rigaud had brought over the sartorial aspect, the swish-swash and swirl of dashing clothes and brocaded curtains.

Grandeur without seriousness, elegant manners without sincerity, a continual pursuit of gaiety, a court life like a perpetual masquerade—such were the background and motivation of art in *le grand siècle*. The centre of courtly activity has been shifted from Fontainebleau and “the château country” to Paris, where the Louvre is, by 1650, a pretentious and expansive palace, largely through the initiative of Henry II, spurred on by his favourite Diane de Poitiers, somewhat through that of Henry IV and Richelieu. The Luxembourg was a second Italian-French Renaissance palace in Paris, built by Marie de’ Medici, queen of Henry IV, and there were other notable centres of courtly activities, including the Tuileries and the palace of Richelieu.

The type palace of the age of the great monarchs is, however, the suburban one at Versailles. It had been until the accession of Louis XIV a *petit château*, really a hunting lodge and hideaway for the Sun-King’s moody predecessor. But the greatest of the Louis set about to construct, around the little lodge, the most magnificent of royal residences. He once was chided by his minister Colbert, who preferred to see the Louvre further glorified, in these words: “This house contributes more to the pleasure and distraction of Your Majesty than to your glory. If Your Majesty should seek to find in Versailles the five hundred thousand crowns which have been spent there in two years, you would have difficulty in finding them.”

The king was merely spurred on to further expenditure, to creating at whatever cost an unexampled regal setting for the court pageantry. A mere palace, however magnificent, was not enough. André Le Nôtre laid out the surrounding gardens, which have been a model for park designers ever since,

and they were enriched with accessory temples, fountains, grottoes, and statuary. The spirit of fêtes and pageants was externalized everywhere, inside and out, so that the dandies and the courtesans might never be without cushioned salons and boudoirs, romantic love nooks and rustic bowers.

The great art of France centred here, as well as the dilettante activity: the dramatists and actors came to the palace theatre, and staged masques in the gardens. Here French opera was born, and the ballet developed (under imported Italian masters). Here poets and architects and painters met and conversed and drank.

It was the courtesan element that triumphed in painting and architecture. Nowhere else have the names of women entered so persistently into history as in the France of the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Certainly nowhere else has visual art been so feminized. It need not for that reason alone be frivolous art. But the nature of the women who advised and led the French kings was of a sort to influence the artist toward the make-believe thing toward ostentatious artificiality and light ornamentalism. Interior decoration is soon transformed from baroque to rococo—the rock-and-shell style—and then to a delicate and not unpleasant boudoir version of neo-classic design. Painting becomes Watteau, Boucher, Fragonard.

Some people are willing to credit two or three royal mistresses with the will to superfluous ornamentation which determined styles in furnishing (and these were to persist as elegant fashions down to 1920), and they believe it was the mischievous taste of these women that turned French painting away from the lead of Poussin and Claude and toward the trivial *fêtes-galantes* ideal. It is a more likely guess that baroque being in the air, any court determined to be gay and fashionable, whether mistress-ridden or not, would have arrived at walls lined with delicate curves, and flower-strewn, and at paintings painstakingly sweet and frivolous, without solidity or sincerity.

The best painters of the time are not to be dismissed as only and always concerned with frivolities and furbelows, or their intentions condemned as consistently trivial and insincere. One wisely takes into consideration that all men have their light moments, one bows, moreover, before the inescapable historical fact that up to the early twentieth century the tradition persisted of art as a commodity especially contrived for ladies, or for festive and inconsequential occasions. Many histories, indeed, list Watteau and Fragonard among the greatest masters. For the rococo environment—and what museum escapes some faint suggestion of it—they are perfect.



Largilliere *The Marquis of Montespan*  
 [Courtesy California Palace of the Legion of Honour]

The virtues of Largilliere and Rigaud are obvious, from almost any simple example. The picture is like the sitter's dress: satiny, befrilled, an honest reflection of sartorial magnificence. But Watteau and Boucher and Fragonard pretend to more than that single-minded exaltation of vestments. Besides, there *aren't* any clothes on a good many of the bodies they portray.

Antoine Watteau was first of the *galante* school. His lack of physical robustness may have had something to do with the extreme delicacy of his paint-

ing method His death came at the age of thirty-seven, from tuberculosis He is at his best in the exquisite illustrations of dressed-up courtiers as they stroll, play games, dance, make love, or embark for the enchanted isles, in an environment of festooned parks and gardens and pastoral fields For this light business he had just the right fluttering touch His colours are appropriately fresh and sweet Occasionally he pulls together the composition, too, until one feels a pleasant pictorial compactness (But one really dare not defend him, once judgment is put upon the basis of plastic organization, for the unity and controlled movement which Giorgione and Titian had beautifully managed in the earliest important pastoral scenes are here badly and finally dissipated) !

Watteau painted the Italian comedians successfully, in a truthful record exciting to students of the theatre, and there are individual portraits But one comes back always gratefully to the brittle enchantment of *The Embarkation for Cythera* or the *Fête Champêtre* or *The Garden of St Cloud*

Watteau was born of Flemish parents, but he took on Parisian refinements until, in his last period, he was considered the most French of painters The Academy, however, still pretending to a "classic" standard, received him (in 1712) under the designation "*peintre des fêtes galantes*" Incidentally it is illuminating to know that Watteau had little to do directly with the court at Versailles There was by this time a circle of secondary courts, of state officials, cardinals, social pretenders, and visiting nobles, which patronized the rising fashionable artists, and of course demanded just as frivolous fare as the royal entourage consumed Watteau was never official court painter He gained his living from the lesser aristocrats

In the end he destroyed such of his paintings and sketches as seemed to him too erotic, and he painted a *Crucifixion* for the pastor of the town in which he was dying The incident reminds one that nude picturing had taken a turn for the worse in the hothouse courtly atmosphere Never before had there been such a teasing display of breasts, such a frank parading of female haunches, and on the other hand such a gallery of characterless faces In many earlier eras the nude had served art beautifully, especially in Greece and Italy Even the erotic note had been integral and acceptable in the noble mythological pieces of Titian Nor had the frank sensuality of Rubens's fleshy women been as disturbing as these slyly carnal French things This is the climax, however, so far as leading painters are concerned There is a reaction toward the puritanic when the monarchy falls, and similarly, of course, in



Watteau: *Fête Champêtre*. National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh [Annan photo]

the British school. And nineteenth-century nudes will return to innocence when not forgotten in the artists' return to a search for formal excellencies out of the painting craft.

Nicolas Lancret and Jean-Baptiste Pater seem to belong even more completely than Watteau to the world of dalliance and light amourousness. The one frankly copied Watteau's manner; the other had been his assistant. Jean-Marc Nattier returned a little way toward the older methods of portraiture: developed a style of portrait painting that is midway between Largillière's costume glorification and Watteau's dainty illustrating. Maurice-Quentin de la Tour, chief among a considerable group of pastellists of the time, suc-



Watteau *The Embarkation for Cythera* Louvre [Archives Photographiques]

ceeded in making portraits that were showy, even flashy, and yet speakingly alive and truthful

The great figure next in succession to Watteau is François Boucher. His method of painting is more solid, but his morals are considerably flimsier. No one in these days, of course, asks that art have a prime concern with morals. But Boucher's canvases so preponderantly—and so prettily!—deal with the lusts of the flesh, that his very anti-morality demands notice. His subjects may pretend to be Greek goddesses or shepherdesses from remote times or just "models", but they are all in actual fact up-to-the-moment Parisiennes displaying lovely bodies or very frankly provoking an erotic response. Within the limits of the *rocaille* atmosphere, Boucher is a competent decorator; he does not relax the design element as had Watteau, does not entirely fritter away the structure. He is a different sort of purveyor of pretty trifles—and in the final accounting a less interesting one. He became President of the Academy and *Premier Peintre du Roi*, and was appropriately the favourite painter of la Pompadour.



Boucher *Jupiter in the Guise of Diana and Calisto*  
 [Courtesy William Rockwell Nelson Gallery of Art Kansas City]

But Jean-Honore Fragonard of the following generation, born almost exactly a half-century later than Watteau, is the finer—and the final—flower of French baroque impulse. For elegance, dash, and superficial brilliance he is unsurpassed. He is intimate and trivial and deft. At the same time he is unreal, remote from life, and his backgrounds are theatrical scenery. He could decorate a salon or a boudoir more smartly and more seductively than any one else, and did, for the du Barry (though once by her rebuffed) and the rest.

Fragonard failed to die before the monarchy was overthrown. When the tinsel world of Versailles and the Tuileries collapsed, and heads began to fall, the reason for his art was (at least temporarily) gone. He was even in some personal danger, it seems. Some of the stricter revolutionaries wanted to do away with him as a useless survivor of the *fêtes-galantes* world. But, long



before, he had happened to do a favour to one Louis-Jacques David, who in the reversed order of things now turned up as art dictator

His life spared, Fragonard still could not paint, however, in the new serious manner In 1806 Napoleon had him turned out from his studio in the Louvre (with all the other artists working there), and he promptly died In his work he epitomized an epoch, which now was—not unjustly and not unfortunately perhaps—terminated

“Old men,” wrote Anatole France, “hold far too obstinately to their opinions That is why the Fiji Islanders kill their parents when they show their age In this way they facilitate evolution, while we retard progress by founding Academies”

Art academies are continually under fire from creative artists, and yet they exist in all the countries devoted to culture in a serious way In the kingdoms they are “Royal,” elsewhere “National” They are the strongholds of old artists who seek to protect Tradition Sometimes they do good, slowing up revolutions not well prepared for In general they retard progress by controlling exhibition halls and museums and denying entry to the younger creative men, controlling also art education and the art press Every so often the revolutionary stream becomes so strong that it washes over the Academy, sometimes overturning it, oftener leaving some of the new ideas within the fortress walls—when a new Tradition is set up, congealed, and defended In France for a long time Academy membership had the advantage of securing jobs, and sometimes a clever politician-artist could get his son elected, and thus financially cared for, for life

The French Royal Academy of Painting was founded in 1648 A simple guild no longer seemed adequate, when the artists were working practically hand-in-glove with the king and his courtiers In general the important members were at first the decorators who had built on the tradition brought from Italy The now debilitated classic style was the thing to be defended.

Sometimes, of course, all the greatest artists belonged to the Academy A body of practitioners that has the sanction and, actually, the ear of the king is not lightly to be flouted. But an occasional creative painter rebelled and stayed apart. When a ‘light’ painter like Watteau was admitted, it must be in a lower category than the “history painters” Nothing was taught in the official art school other than ‘history painting’—in the grand manner

Le Brun had been the real organizer of the Academy, and in painting it



Fragonard *Love Letters* Frick Collection, New York  
[Photo, courtesy Frick Art Reference Library]

had remained at about his level or even lower. But in another direction it had served France well. Le Brun had worked in close co-operation with Colbert, the minister of Louis XIV. While Colbert had opposed the king's vast expenditures at Versailles, he believed that a court's and even a country's importance could be measured by the grandeur of its artistic monuments. He set out to adorn Paris to the extent of rendering it beyond challenge the artistic capital of the world. Concurrently he encouraged with grants such

establishments as those producing Gobelin tapestries and Sèvres porcelains

The Academies (there were those of architecture and music also) were to Colbert a part of the regulatory and fostering machinery. That he was successful in establishing France as the arbiter of European taste, and in rendering the court of Louis a model for that of every kingdom and principality, cannot be questioned. The chairs we all sit in, the mantels over our fireplaces, or the curtains in our bedrooms are likely to bear the mark of one of the Louis.

Of course the demands Colbert made on the artists were in many cases impossible of fulfilment. He ordered the architects to create a French order of architecture as distinctive as the Greek, but there is no recorded consummation of this feat. He naïvely thought the rules of painting could be permanently codified, and that out of a fostering academy a national school of great painters would automatically result. The academicians undertook by a series of *Conferences*, since famous, to formulate the rules. However far they got, it was not far enough to encompass the creative element in art. They and Colbert had better luck, however, in forming a royal collection of paintings which they set up in the Louvre—twenty-four hundred pictures in all, the basis of the collection there today.

Truly creative artists are apt to froth at the mouth when an academy is mentioned (although they have often been known to quiet down when invited to membership), and the controversy over the usefulness of the institution rages today as in the era of monarchy in France. In any case the academies provide an incident not to be overlooked in the chronicles of visual art.

While Paris and Versailles were witnessing the two developments side by side—an academic rhetorical moribund painting and a baroque-influenced sentimental, boudoir-and-bonbon-box painting—a single artist was going his way unconcerned, honest, independent. Jean-Baptiste Chardin has left to posterity, from the era of the Great Kings, a group of unpretentious, humbly simple paintings, which is today valued beyond the beguiling things of Watteau, Boucher, and Fragonard. He was not without an appreciative, if unfashionable, audience in his own time. He then suffered almost total eclipse for a century. Today he has come into his own.

It is now seen that Chardin, alone among the host of eighteenth-century French painters, picked up the structural values known to Poussin—revived the lapsed tradition of consciously ordered design in painting. Beside the



Chardin: *Lady with a Bird-Organ* Frick Collection, New York  
 [Photo, courtesy Frick Art Reference Library]

*fêtes-galantes* artists he is solid, sound, and an honest craftsman. In his sympathies he was closer to the Dutch and Flemish contemporaries than to French or Italian painters; in his craftsmanship, too. But he had personality enough to make his own distinctive—and in that country wholly exceptional—contribution: he painted a body of pictures formally creative, depending very little upon subject-matter for their lasting appeal, and untouched by any breath of either frivolity or rhetoric.

Chardin was through and through a bourgeois. Born the son of a cabinet-maker, he remained throughout his life an associate of carpenters and petty craftsmen and tradesfolk. The longest trip he ever made seems to have been that from Paris to Versailles. He studied with routine painters. Then he came under the influence of a dilettante artist-collector who had studied in Amsterdam, and it may have been that this taught him to look for subjects in his own intimate bourgeois environment. He was presently doing genre studies

in the Low Countries fashion. He even deceived some of his fellow-painters into taking his work for Dutch. He lived uneventfully, he was a hard worker and a respected neighbour, he really cared only for his painting and the homely pleasures of the lower bourgeoisie.

For many years he painted housewives and children, and people gaming and letter-writing and contentedly working at their unspectacular tasks. During the last quarter-century of his career, until his death in 1779 he did only still-lives. His genre pieces were and are, of course, the more popular. One can imagine how in their own day they delighted the people they portrayed. For these modest canvases are like mirrors held up to the workers in kitchens and parlours and bedrooms, so accurate is Chardin's seeing, so careful his craftsmanship.

Yet what makes them today much more than mirror art, superior, for instance, to the genre of de Hooch and Steen and Teniers, is a quality or value hidden by Chardin within each picture. It is because it has to do with design rather than subject-matter that the artist dropped from sight for a century or so. It was Cézanne who brought a new significance to it, leading to a reconsideration of all art, who unknowingly put Chardin on the way to being rediscovered.

It is said that Chardin saw common things magically. It may be more accurate to say that he arranged with a magic of the imagination what he saw. He puts into his simple interior scenes the organizational order, half mathematical, half mystical, that Poussin put into grand landscapes. It is the design element, sweetly balanced, harmoniously adjusted. There are, too, other virtues in Chardin's work: his sure lighting, his playing over lovely textures for their own sake, his reserved but ingratiating colour.

Chardin is not one of the giant figures of art. His field is small. His triumph is that of a man doing a lesser thing supremely well. In his field he affords a sure but delicate pleasure. It was his distinction to be utterly honest, wholly unassuming, when fashionable art around him was all on the side of insincere pretence and rhetorical bombast. It might be argued that Versailles, for all its surface magnificence, for all the popularity of its decorative painters, was the accident, the departure from normal French art, that the humble and unfashionable Chardin marks better the path of the French genius, midway between Poussin and Cézanne.

## CHAPTER XXV

### Portrait, Landscape, and Story-Picture The British

OUTSIDE England the name best known in the annals of British visual art is not that of a painter, a sculptor, or an architect, but that of a theorist and critic, John Ruskin. The circumstance is eloquent of a truth regarding the approach to art in Britain, it is literary and intellectual, associative and thoughtful, rather than intensely creative.

Ruskin, in a chapter of *The Two Paths*, entitled "The Deteriorative Power of Conventional Art over Nations," wrote as follows:

Wherever art is practised for its own sake, and the delight of the workman is in what he *does* and *produces*, instead of what he *interprets* or *exhibits*, there art has an influence of the most fatal kind on brain and heart, and it issues, if long so pursued, in the *destruction both of intellectual power and moral principle*, whereas art, devoted humbly and self-forgetfully, to the clear statement and record of the facts of the universe, is always helpful and beneficent to mankind, full of comfort, strength and salvation. Review for yourselves the history of art, and you will find this to be a manifest certainty, that *no great school ever yet existed which had not for primal aim the representation of some natural fact as truly as possible*. [The italics are Ruskin's.]

Leave, therefore, boldly, though not irreverently, mysticism and symbolism on the one side, cast away with utter scorn geometry and legalism on the other, seize hold of God's hand, and look full in the face of His creation, and there is nothing He will not enable you to achieve.

He proceeds then to note the complementary need for "the gift of design"—which he interprets as intellectual.

That collateral necessity is the visible operation of human intellect in the presentation of truth, the evidence of what is properly called design or plan in the work, no less than of veracity. A looking glass does not design—it receives and communicates indiscriminately all that passes before it, a painter designs when he chooses some things, refuses others, and arranges all

Miltons and Shelleys Literature is the art of England, as music is (after the sixteenth century) the art of Germany

Let us begin, then, by admitting that there is here no one to put beside Titian and El Greco and Giotto, not even a match for Velazquez or Raphael or Goya. There exists, nonetheless, an interest for the world in the English school, as there is an interest in the "little Dutchmen" or the Romans.

What, the student may well inquire, is the reason for this lack of top-ranking artists in three major arts—for architecture and sculpture are in the same case—among a people obviously world-leaders in material enterprise, in scientific advancement, and in a different branch of art? Can there be such a thing as a nation that is form-blind, or a race unaware of sensuous loveliness? Is it inhibition from within, or some outward binding circumstance?

Puritanism is one reason given. The Reformation brought to England and to Scotland a wave of intolerance and iconoclasm intense and bitter beyond even the developments in Germany and Holland. The rich medieval arts of Britain, painting, sculpture, and ornamentation, which had survived through the days of the Tudors and the Stuarts, were wiped out as at a stroke. A single entry in the records of a "visitor" appointed by Parliament in 1643 to demolish "the superstitious pictures and ornaments of churches" reads "Clare we brake down 1000 pictures superstitious." The tradition of Puritanism continued through many generations and confused the sensuously beautiful with the sinful sensual pleasures. The beginnings of the arts in colonial America too suffered under this inhibiting influence.

The British court, however, soon escaped into pastures decorative and even licentious. The fact dovetails nicely with the next conventional explanation of the lack of deeply creative activity: painting for a century and a half after the Restoration was a *class* art, designed exclusively (with the exception of Hogarth's works) for the peerage and squirearchy. At first the court circle held all the patrons, and there was a period of imported painters. When Reynolds broke through the prejudice, by the sheer merit of his competitive work, and when the circle of patrons widened, there was a cycle of fashions in fulsome portraiture.

For a long time portraits were all that picture-buyers wanted. Art was a feeder to pride and a means to signalize gentility. And of course the sort of portrait wanted was the flattering, prettified, showy thing. Three generations of the best talent in England seem to have been diverted into this fashion-serving business. Some blame the artists who gave in to a stultifying demand

It would be unfair to let the excerpt stand for Ruskin's theories without noting qualifications which he elsewhere set down, particularly as regards the need for composition and the necessity to see down to the *organism* of nature. Nevertheless, the central thought of the few sentences—their insistence upon *veracity* and upon *intellectual control*—is at the heart of British æsthetics down to the opening of the twentieth century. The foundation of practice is naturalism, the method is that of the mind, which distrusts mystical and formal elements, valuing instead literary allusion, associative sentiment, and instruction. English art, when it is not merely pretty portraiture or landscape, more than any other national manifestation favours anecdote, incident, and moral reflection.

Ruskin is one of the most interesting figures in art criticism. Let no one mistake his importance—even his constructive importance at the time he wrote. The impassioned plea for a renewed contact with nature was sorely needed. It followed upon an era given to some very negative sorts of artificiality. But in the longer view Ruskin seems wrong-headed and downright mischievous with his "veracity" and intellectual choosing and moral principle. Certain immediate truths he found and admirably fought for, but there was a larger truth he missed.

There is apparent everywhere in the serious art works of England the intellectual good intention. But generally, they turn away from what should after all be a goal of creative art—the attainment of a self-sufficient, inbuilt formal vitality. Rhythm, organization, all that the moderns mean by the term "expressive form" is femininely weak or utterly lacking in the popular portraiture from Reynolds to Lawrence. It is wellnigh lost in the topographical landscapes from Wilson to Cotman. Blake alone richly feels and expresses it in his remote, almost miniature contribution, and at times, Turner.

At its best, art spiritually expresses peoples and lands. But there is no visual art deeply expressing England. There is little painting that gives the feeling of the lovely English countryside or the bleak coasts or the idyllic hamlets, none that expresses the virile life, the inquiring spirit, the dogged fighting temper, and the magnificence of empire-building.

The literature of England is magnificent, is such a monument as no other modern nation has erected. The poets from the age of Spenser, Marlowe, and Shakespeare to the opening of the twentieth century have known how to express English thought, life, and feeling in accents lacking nothing of formal beauty. But among British painters there are no Shakespeares and





*Lady Margaret Beaufort* Anonymous, 15th century  
[Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London]

the country's own reaction to it and love for it, and the common ranking of Reynolds, Gainsborough and Romney among the greatest masters of all time

In early British art formal values were not unduly sacrificed. In certain crafts practised in the monasteries the English workers led the world most notably in embroidering. Examples are to be found in the treasures of continental cathedrals today. But the iconoclasts left few examples of native Gothic painting. Nor is it certain that the chief relic of primitive painting

In certain conspicuous cases they made great fortunes and lived the socially glittering life. Others blame what they are pleased to term the English hostility to genius and blindness to formally rich art. The occupants of that camp declare that the artists, to avoid starvation, were forced to give in to the demands of patrons short-sighted and insensitive. They point out that Richard Wilson, "father of British landscape," *was* permitted to starve.

Or again the blame is carried to the Royal Academy and the spirit of conservatism and regimentation which it represents. The Academy has been continuously strong in Britain since its founding in 1768. The tendency to hold habitually to the rhetoric of the past, or at least to ideals a half-century outgrown, so that the academicians seem invariably to be fighting against the art that is living in its own day, is even more marked in England than in France. It has ever been the British public's way to respect authority, and an establishment with the royal sanction is accorded a popular esteem if not reverence hardly matched elsewhere.

The Academy's first president, and leading spirit, was Sir Joshua Reynolds, proponent of the "grand style," who said that nature should be understood first through a study of the great masters—among whom, to the misfortune of his followers, he placed Lodovico Caracci. Even today most of the British academicians might subscribe without embarrassment to the bulk of Sir Joshua's pronouncements. In any case, historically, the popular support of academism, and its hold upon the art school even to the opening of the twentieth century, help to explain the lack of formal creativeness and imaginative invention in British visual art.

These are, no doubt, generalizations not a little dangerous. But one records them precisely because one hopes to avoid that larger and even more dangerous generalization—that an entire national or racial group is constitutionally insensitive to formal values—that the British (or the Anglo-Saxons) are deficient in feeling for the sensuously lovely and the plastically vital elements in art.

England's serious art, then, is of the camera-eye and the brain. There is also an immense popular audience for the whimsical and the roguish. It all leads to literature in art, away from pictorial structure, plastic rhythm, and the architectonic virtues.

In a very great deal of British appreciation it is the collateral literary, social, and historical significance that most counts. Without recognition of this associative factor, one cannot approach English art with understanding of



*Lady Margaret Beaufort* Anonymous, 15th century  
[Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London]

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now existing in England, the Wilton Diptych, is from an English hand (It has been variously attributed to British, French, Flemish, Italian, and German masters) It is a lovely thing of its sort, more finished in aspect and in craftsmanship than the usual exhibits offered as primitive in France and Flanders.

There is no traceable British school in the fifteenth century. A picture of about 1485, however, the portrait of Lady Margaret Beaufort, claimed for an anonymous English master, is marked by an exceptionally sound pictorial sense, has an expert structural solidity. It proclaims stylistic affinity with Flemish portraiture.

In the following century, when the tide of Renaissance cultural influences flows strong from Italy, the native painters are definitely overshadowed by the imported masters. Holbein is in England from 1526 to 1543. From Moor to Van Dyck there is a procession of able foreign-trained portraitists. Of the English, the ones oftenest named are Nicholas Hilliard, of the Elizabethan era, and John Riley, who lived from 1646 to 1691.

Hilliard was primarily a miniaturist. He copied too directly for his own good the popular manner of Holbein. He wrote "The principal part of Painting or Drawing after the life consisteth in truth to lyne the lyne without shadows sheweth all to good judgment." And again "Holbein's manner of limning I have imitated holding it to be the best."<sup>1</sup>

Riley, if he is the painter of the portrait, *Martha, Wife of Joshua Horton of Sowerby*, which is ascribed to him by half of the authorities, had an original and noteworthy talent. It is an admirable bit of characterization, and it also is beautifully managed as a pictorial entity, with weight, mass, and dark-light patterning expertly capitalized. Nor is it to be overlooked that this seems a typical English thing, proclaims itself of the Puritan period with no breath of the superficial brilliance and glitter which the imported artists had made fashionable among the aristocrats. More on the showy side is Riley's celebrated portrait of James II in the National Portrait Gallery.

There are scattered anonymous portraits from the Elizabethan, Stuart, and Restoration periods which indicate a continued competent production. An occasional one is decoratively appealing in a way common to minor French, Flemish, and Spanish portraiture of the time. Particularly effective are the figures or busts enriched with detailed delineation of lace and embroidery accessories, so that the main areas of the picture are traced over with intricate patterning. The mode may have come in first with the minute depiction of

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Charles Johnson in *English Painting from the Seven h Century to the Present Day*



*Mariha Wife of Joshua Horton of Sowerby Possibly by John Riley  
[Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London]*

textures cultivated by the early Flemings. It was only slightly modified in France by the school of the Clouets. In Spain it became popular after Antonio Moor was appointed resident painter at the court of Madrid, and was carried on by his pupil Coello. Moor helped to establish the vogue in England. It resulted in even more appealing variations when men less accomplished in naturalism took it in hand. Then the naïve, frankly artificial intention yielded a result more ingratiating than the exact imitation.

A Fleming who spent his entire mature life in England Marc Gheeraerts the Younger, was particularly happy in this milieu Cornelius Johnson, born in England of a Flemish father, made excellent incidental use of a flattened pattern of laces and accessories in contrast with the full modelled face His medallion of Lady Waterpark is charming and sound Before 1700 this type of portraiture, based on minute realism, but happily modified by naïvely decorative intention, had found its way to America, and a recent flurry of interest over "American primitive" has resulted in admission of a number of ornamental if rather stiff portraits into the public galleries

All this time the British court circles and fashionable society had been patronizing the foreign masters whom the kings or powerful ministers and merchants invited to England After Holbein, who was court painter to Henry VIII, had come Antoon Moor In 1629 Rubens arrived in London on a diplomatic mission, and stayed for a time to paint In 1632 Van Dyck became court painter to Charles I It was upon the work of Rubens and Van Dyck, perhaps unfortunately, that the later group of English portraitists was to base its tradition the celebrated school of Reynolds-Gainsborough-Romney

Before the time of Sir Joshua, however, two other spectacular foreigners dominate the London scene Sir Peter Lely was a Hollander who became extraordinarily popular during a lifetime spent in England He constructed his pictures well, but there is a flamboyant nervousness and generally a superficiality about his effects His successor was Sir Godfrey Kneller, a German who studied in Amsterdam His sitters are given more of three-dimensional solidity, but in general it is the showy, essentially baroque element of Rubens or Van Dyck which is carried on, to have effect upon Reynolds (who is born in the year of Kneller's death 1723)

It will not have escaped the reader that the entire story of English painting to this time has been of portraiture France also had been portrait-mad in the two and one-half centuries between Fouquet and Largillière, but on the continent other types of painting had not been entirely crowded out Landscape, 'historical pictures' and genre all had found practitioners and public response.

In Britain the one mode suffices A special form, the miniature, is added to the larger categories The word 'miniature' as applied to earlier painting is used to designate the illustrations in illuminated manuscripts But from the sixteenth century on—illuminating having been neglected as an art after



Gheeraedts: Queen Elizabeth [Courtesy National Portrait Gallery, London]

printed books became common—the name is transferred to the tiny portable pictures, usually portraits, painted on ivory. The size is small enough for the pocket, or for the palm of the hand; a true miniature will be marked also by an appropriate minuteness of depiction and a delicacy of method.

The first portable or detached miniatures had been painted on vellum, had been, indeed, merely a version of the miniature likeness of king or donor found on the dedicatory pages of manuscripts, or even on illuminated proclamations, charters, etc. Sometimes the portraits were done on the backs of playing cards. Then came ivory specially shaped for the purpose. It is likely

that the first great popularity of miniature portraits dates from the fifteenth-century French wars, when knights and fair ladies, honourably separated carried consoling likenesses next their hearts or on necklaces. Although France initiated the custom, England made the miniature her special own.

Hogarth is most English of the Englishmen in his purposeful approach to art, his literary documentation, and his moral aim, most English too in his weak grasp upon pictorial structure and formal concentration. But he is completely out of line in that he abandons portraiture for the story-picture. He is the only British artist of consequence in four hundred years who fails to devote himself to portraits and landscapes.

A great independent on so many scores—he disdained and pilloried the fashionable foreign painters and those who aped them—and gifted with wit and courage, he might have been England's greatest artist if he had had the picture sense of a Hokusai, a Brueghel, or a Daumier. As it is he interests the world by his mordant social satire—and draws closer attention as an artist of calibre by at least one picture, the *Shrimp Girl*.

Born in 1697, of middle-class parents, to a somewhat cramped environment, Hogarth never outgrew a certain limited view. He had, as he said, "a naturally good eye," and he trained it to retain impressions, so that he was able later to dispense with models. He had the Englishman's pride in bluntness, the self-made man's dogmatism, and the literalist's scorn for all art that was not illustration. He raised popular illustration to a socially and politically significant activity, and by his engraving he brought serious art down to the English masses.

Hogarth invented an art-form new to England—the serial story-picture. He painted and engraved satires on the depraved life of "high society." He adopted the technique of the theatre, which he loved (not forgetting the heavily underlined moral that was a part of the play). Indeed he said that his intention was "to give in his pictures all that an actor can do on the stage", and he spoke of "men and women my players." His three series, entitled *Marriage à la Mode*, *The Harlot's Progress*, and *The Rake's Progress*, are among the classics of pictorial satire. No less interesting as comment, or lampoon, are such single pieces as *Taste in High Life*, *Gin Lane*, and *The Distressed Poet*.

The artist's pictures are so diverting as illustration and as social comedy that one is likely to forgive his overcrowding and the fact that he makes concentration impossible by his over-attention to detail. The portraits are in the final analysis just a little insensitive, even wooden. His version of the "con-





Hogarth *The Shrimp Girl* [Courtesy National Gallery, London]

versation piece" (of which more in a moment) is lively and diverting, but superficially posed. The story-pictures—"dramatic paintings," he called them—with few exceptions sacrifice everything to story, or to propaganda. In the end one comes back to two fugitive and uncharacteristic things, the virile and dashing sketch of *The Shrimp Girl* and the well-composed *Calais Gate*, wherein for once Hogarth disciplined his materials and fitted them within a coherent pictorial scheme—although conveying too his contemptuous feeling about the "depraved" life of the French. Elsewhere he is so intent upon depicting and sermonizing about the vices and foibles of his contemporaries

that he forgets that his pictorial medium should have an architecture and an organic coherence

If British painting is, as we suspect, over-literary, Hogarth is its accomplished pamphleteer. He adds the controversialist's overemphasis to story materials. A curious sidelight is thrown on Hogarth's approach by a book he wrote under the title *The Analysis of Beauty*. Having made a popular success in illustration and satire, he desired at the end, of course, the one sort of recognition his achievement did not warrant: he wanted to claim pre-eminence as "pure artist." He rightly hated "the grand manner" and made rich fun of the artists who professed a devotion to the "sublime", and he considered the proposal for a British Academy silly—"a ridiculous imitation of the foolish parade of the French Academy." But the grand-manner people had a something—if only, in England, a prettiness—that he wanted to understand and master. His vanity led him to publish a treatise "Written with a view of fixing the fluctuating Ideas of Taste," and explaining "the fundamental principles of Beauty—Fitness, Variety, Uniformity, Simplicity, Intricacy, and Quantity." One of his generalizations, that there is a 'line of beauty,' a curved line found oftenest in silhouettes of the female human body, has survived for discussion in later books on aesthetics. For the rest, Hogarth's precepts went the way of his unfortunate attempts to equal the "sublime" painters on their own ground.

The "conversation piece" is a typically British variation of group portraiture. It shows, in a not too serious vein, an English family at one of its routine gatherings—at table, in the garden, in the drawing room—conversing. It is intimate in atmosphere and artfully artless, with figures carefully posed as if they had casually fallen into the attitudes. A master of this minor mode was John Zoffany, a German born painter. He documented the polite world of his time with an unassuming simplicity which is appealing and especially refreshing after a session with the heavily satiric and moralistic pounding of Hogarth. Not unconnected in intention with the conversation piece is that other English specialty, the sporting picture. It has had, apparently, no masters in other than an illustrational and sentimental sense.

One artist beside Hogarth touched a high mark in satire and caricature, and was equally unafraid of the sordid and the brutal: Thomas Rowlandson. He belongs chronologically to the era of the later portraitists and of Blake, and so is out of line here. But his slender and isolated genius is linked, if at all with Hogarth's. His restless curiosity and a moralizing impulse led him in

the direction of popular print-making and routine illustration, and in the end he is an accomplished draughtsman, master of expressive line, rather than a picture-maker in the fuller sense. He bridges over to George Cruikshank rather than to the artists in oil.

But these have been excursions from the main path of British painting, which continued to take fashionable artists into the one activity, portraiture, in a direction which the criticism of the time considered classical. There had been, in the early eighteenth century, the so-called Classical Age of English literature, adorned by the poetry of Pope and the essays of Addison and Steele. Architecture had become neo-classic, in a version adapted from Italian Renaissance models, had wavered toward the baroque, and now under Robert Adam had returned to the classic idioms. The furniture styles of Hepplewhite and Sheraton were soon to supplement Adam building and, not long after, the drawings of John Flaxman.

But British painting escaped every adjective in the definition of classic. It had fallen heir, rather, to the baroque tendencies of Rubens and Van Dyck. The youthful English artist paid homage to the Italian masters upon his "grand tour," but it was a debased neo-classicism that now passed current in Rome and Naples. Nor can one believe that England escaped a certain influence from the light ornamentalism of Watteau, Nattier, and Fragonard, in vogue across the Channel.

Whatever the sources, whatever the inventive additions, British portraiture is a sort of fluffed-up realism. A surface naturalism of facial aspect is basic to it, but there is superadded the baroque artist's liveliness and glitter, by means of glorified clothes and stage-setting backgrounds, and by a feathery technique. The classical busts and urns and ruins so frequently inserted into the backcloths of Reynolds's portraits are no more than ornamental theatrical properties. They really have no relationship with the actors. They are as innocent of any connexion with the spirit and method of the painting as are the negligently sketched trees and parks and lawns among which they appear. The portrait's the thing, the rest is dressing.

Sir Joshua Reynolds was the first of the line of fashionable native painters. He was a man of robust tastes, of affable social address, of wide culture and cosmopolitan contacts, of shrewd commercial and political ability. He was well fitted to express the age of Britain's economic expansion, to be head of its Royal Academy, to be himself a sign of the arrival of British art at ma-



Reynolds, Jane Countess of Harrington  
[Courtesy Huntington Art Gallery, San Marino, California]

turity and sophistication. He is the premier interpreter of the materialism and display of the age. But he stands virtuously above its profligacy.

A chance meeting with the owner of a sailing vessel, after Reynolds had had an average training, permitted him to go to Italy. For ever after he called Michelangelo his god, but, true first to principles he had already had from Rubens and Van Dyck, he added certain traits out of lesser and later Italian masters. He believed thoroughly in eclecticism. Back in London, in 1752, he made an immediate popular success. Thenceforward he was England's favoured portraitist, arbiter of artistic controversies, and member of the literary-social group which included Goldsmith, Johnson, and Garrick.

Never did a leading artist more successfully preach one sort of art and practise another. The particular ideal set up in his famous *Discourses* is "the Grand Style." There are wisdom and common sense in some of his pronouncements, particularly in those by which he tried to make young painters realize the necessity for seeing objects in full volume, with light around them. But in others there is an indication of that haziness, not to say insincerity, which landed his own paintings over on the side of superficial grandeur and virtuoso theatricality. He is a realistic painter of silks and satins, of fashions and masks, within an artificial framework faintly classic.

Of portraiture he writes: "He who in his practice of portrait painting wishes to dignify his subject, which we will suppose to be a lady, will not paint her in the modern dress, the familiarity of which alone is sufficient to destroy all dignity, and therefore dresses his figure something with the general air of the antique for the sake of dignity, and preserves something of the modern for sake of likeness." And curiously he seems to mix expedient sophistry and truth in this observation: "Well-coloured pictures are in more esteem and sell for higher prices than in reason they seem to deserve, as colouring is an excellence of a lower rank than the qualities of correctness and greatness of character."

When Van Dyck had been court portraitist in London, he had himself painted the faces of his patrons but had let assistants paint in their clothes—the costume being left at the studio for the purpose. For the hands he had studio-models, so that he could add those lesser details at odd times. Some other painters are known to have posed sitters so as to hide the hands, to save working at a problem beyond their capacities. Reynolds probably painted the hands in his canvases—but they might be largely from one model. It is certain that he had assistants, known as his drapers, who added backgrounds

and accessories. He sometimes painted his parts of a portrait in four hours.

Grace, colour pleasing up to a point, good taste—these can be granted. We enjoy his adequate likenesses of fair women and innocent children. We admire his stage direction and its results. But about it all there is a rather childish sort of make-believe. If Reynolds thought that he was serving to carry British art out of its insularity, if he believed that he was achieving the Grand Style, and if by the Grand Style he meant the great European tradition, of Titian and Rubens, of Michelangelo and Rembrandt, he utterly failed. He lost completely the sense of organization, the structural order, the formal vitality that are implicit in the pictures of those creators. Beside them Reynolds is rhetorical and sketchy, is concerned with literary and sentimental trivialities—and clothes. His method has more affinity with Watteau's than with that of any solid European master. At first glance his paintings are brilliant, bright, aristocratically elegant. But it turns out to be dazzle rather than a steady light, dash rather than spirit. And the apparent solidity of *Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse* or *Nelly O'Brien* turns out to be based on unimaginative symmetry. A fine exception is the *Lord Heathfield* in the National Gallery, London.

Reynolds was nevertheless a man of his age—one of the greatest "successes" in the history of art. He was appointed court painter and was for twenty-three years President of the Royal Academy. He had a coach with gilded wheels and pictures painted on it. He was knighted and had liveried servants. He earned an immense fortune, just out of picturing, and he had one of the grandest funerals ever known in London, with three dukes and three earls among the pall-bearers, and ninety-one carriages in the procession to St Paul's.

Thomas Gainsborough, who came to popular success more slowly, but just as surely in the end, possessed a more solid talent. Moreover, he played two instruments, portraiture and landscape, whereas Reynolds played but one. He studied only intermittently, but through an advantageous marriage was enabled to continue his practice and experiment, unhampered by the problems of supporting a family, until he found his market. He spent fourteen years painting in Bath, most fashionable and gayest of English resort cities, before he went to London in 1774. In the capital he shared the field with Sir Joshua, as purveyor of portraits to the elegant world. He asked and got princely sums for his pictures—except the landscapes, which cluttered up his house and studio until visitors could hardly get around.

In a great many of Gainsborough's portraits there is a freshness, even a sim-



Reynolds *Lord Heathfield* [Courtesy National Gallery, London]

cerity, generally lacking in the fashionable school. If any of the portraitists approached mastery of plastic values, it was he. There are canvases enough from which one would not guess it. But there is sound construction, and nicety of adjustment, in some of the favourite pieces: the several portraits of his daughters especially, *The Blue Boy*, and the early landscapes.

From a study of Rubens and Van Dyck, Gainsborough had taken the better courtly qualities: a certain dignity, a glamorous sparkle. His backgrounds and his landscapes suffered from a fluttery touch which he had partly out of Rubens but more especially from a minor painter of the Watteau school. But in his eclecticism he was more fortunate than Reynolds. He had a sort of intellectual independence too. When Reynolds proclaimed that blue could not be used successfully except as a minor colour in a picture, Gainsborough painted *The Blue Boy* to prove otherwise. To that extent it is a 'stunt' picture. But it would hardly have become the celebrated work it is if the artist had not given it an unmistakable quality, a unique freshness which was a gift out of his temperament.

Gainsborough loses the less of the sitter's personality, however, by asserting his own. The distinctive loveliness of English womanhood and girlhood is nowhere else so truthfully and winningly conveyed as in the gallery of his portraits. There is less of the masquerade element than in most of the elegant portraiture: more of simple statement and native beauty. If there is any point at which the rather feminine British method of painting is fully justified, it is in Gainsborough's better pictures. This gracious portrayal of English womanhood is happily to be enjoyed in American collections—at Worcester and Elkins Park and most notably in the Huntington Gallery at San Marino, California—as well as in the English galleries.

The Gainsborough landscapes are in general a less fortunate exhibit. The qualities that make for brilliant portraiture are likely to seem artificial in outdoor views. Many landscapes from Gainsborough's hand appear to have been studied from stage scenery rather than nature. The Watteau nervous touch is much in evidence. There is to be credited to the artist, however, a freshness in the use of colour, achieved by a method that anticipated the "pointillism" of the impressionists. In construction and depth, strangely enough, the very early landscapes are superior to later ones. If he had not made such a complete and exacting success of portraiture, diverting his talent into that direction, he might have been among the foremost inventors of modern landscape art.

The other fashionable portraitists except one, fall below distinctive achieve-





Gainsborough *The Blue Boy*  
[Courtesy Huntington Art Gallery, San Marino, California]



Gainsborough *The Artist's Daughters* [Courtesy Worcester Art Museum]

ment George Romney, born in 1734—eleven years later than Reynolds, seven later than Gainsborough—is often put down as one of 'the great trio'. But his picture-making as such is definitely inferior. He had just enough talent to enable him to grasp the formula for 'best-sellers'. A sufficient reality is joined to a deceptive freshness or clarity. He can set down a pretty face charmingly—as in *The Parson's Daughter* and in some of the studies of the fascinating Lady Hamilton. Sir Henry Raeburn, a Scotchman, is a more



Lawrence *Punkie* [Courtesy Huntington Art Gallery, San Marino, California]

literal portraitist, although not without the affectation of a sketchy brilliancy, and sometimes a forced dramatic note. John Hoppner leans to the other side, with less reality but more feminine prettiness. He does a soft portrait nicely, particularly if the sitter is a girlish matron or a pert child.

Sir Thomas Lawrence divided honours with Hoppner in the fashionable circles of London at the end of the century—a full generation after Reynolds and Gainsborough—and he carried the brilliant artificial manner to its ulti-

mate triumph, and its end. In his hands facile brushwork and attenuated grace became hardly less than ravishing. He was a precocious artist, making a living by crayon portraiture at the age of twelve, and exhibiting some of his later-celebrated pictures when he was hardly out of his teens. At twenty-one he painted the queen. The Royal Academy elected him to be an associate when he was twenty-two and to full membership three years later. He was then already the darling of the court and of society. He was duly knighted, and eventually became President of the Academy.

Lawrence's portraits, which constitute his whole achievement, are so self-proclaimingly what they are, with no attempt to veil their theatrical virtues behind pretensions of classic composition or psychological penetration, that one is likely to prefer them to the reputedly soider pictures of Reynolds and Romney. The facile elegance and frank artificiality of *Pinkie* or the *Archduke of Austria* are more ingratiating, and leave a more pleasant impression, than *Mrs. Siddons as the Tragic Muse*, or the equally famous *Nelly O'Brien*, or *Lady Bumbury Sacrificing to the Graces*. Lawrence's work is superficial painting at its very best, possesses, at the least, immediate charm, fastidious fragility, and consummate fluency.

With Lawrence the story of native British portraiture is done. His death in 1830, less than eighty years after Reynolds had started practice in London, closes an era made notable by a larger group of popular and competent purveyors to fashionable demand than had been known in any other time or place. Curiously enough, there will be in London two generations later an American painter who becomes incomparably successful by reason of a superficial brilliancy borrowed from Lawrence: this is Sargent. At the same time there will be another painter there, American-born but essentially an internationalist, who will raise portraiture to a dignity and a formal excellence which none of these others had approached. Whistler. Between 1830 and Whistler's controversial triumphs in the seventies there is no internationally significant British art except that of the independent Turner. The story of his specialty, landscape, begins farther back.

Richard Wilson, born in 1714, is called "the father of British landscape." He is more significant for pioneering, in England, in a type of art then known by the imported canvases of Claude Lorrain and the Dutchmen—and from "views" by the visitors Canaletto and Guardi—than for a distinctive originality. His early works are tinged by classicism of the sort developed by Claude and Poussin in Rome. But, back in England after an Italian visit, Wilson fol-



*Lawrence Archd le Charles of Austria Windsor Castle  
[By gracious permission of His Majesty King George VI]*



Crome: *Windmill on Mousehold Heath* [Courtesy National Gallery, London]

lowed his own course, portraying the English countryside with honesty and a certain attractive realism. He never rose to imaginative vision, nor did he have the power to endow the canvas with a vitality of its own, as Poussin had done, and, in a different way, Ruysdael. He was a prose painter. Wilson's personal story is a pathetic one: he gave up portraiture in which he might have scored a success, to initiate a sort of art in which he had a passionate faith, and he was permitted to spend his best years all but starved in an attic.



Constable *Stoke-by-Nayland* [Courtesy Victoria and Albert Museum]

It was slightly before Wilson's death in 1762 that a single decade saw the birth of England's three greatest landscapists: Crome, Constable, and Turner. John Crome was self-made, unlettered, and provincial. He was a lover of nature in her severer and grander moods, and that love is measurably conveyed in his better canvases, with a native dignity exercised within a borrowed Dutch formula. He is a rare figure in British art in that he made no capital of the picturesque and sought out no sentimental associations. He seems by instinct to have achieved in an occasional canvas a structural order or spatial rhythm. *The Windmill on Mousehold Heath* in the National Gallery, London, is outstanding.

John Constable is, however, the typical English landscapist. He dwells with loving care upon every least detail of the picturesque countryside, but he has enough of genius to convey its atmosphere and spirit too. He sticks to the topographic truth—he would not be essentially British if he greatly violated it—but he had an eye for the large effect of storm, of light-and-shade movement under scurrying clouds, of contrasted dark woods and sunny open



Constable *Landscape with Windmill* [Courtesy Worcester Art Museum]

fields. The heaths, the slow rivers, the cottages, the fresh wet farmlands—these are his materials. His is an honest record of the peculiar outdoor loveliness of England. There is little of inspiration in most of his canvases, only a peculiarly sensitive documentation. But occasionally he becomes almost passionately alive and direct and revealing.

Constable was one of the earliest artists to insist that landscapes be painted from nature, and his storm pictures are perhaps the earliest to warrant the name "impressions." One feels the swift pleasure of his discovery of an evanescent light-dark effect, and the best of his work results when he does not spend too much time finishing the picture in the studio afterward.

Some of Constable's precepts regarding the significance of the immediate impression and the importance of freshness foreshadowed axioms of the impressionists actually so called, of a half-century later. He was before them.





Constable: *The Haywain* [Courtesy National Gallery, London]

too in the discovery of reflected light as varied colour on all objects, and even in shadows; although he did not exploit colour in the lavish if not reckless manner of the eighties. He does, however, warrant being called a colourist. Constable and Turner were the only Englishmen ever to influence deeply the main European visual tradition. (Lawrence had had a vogue on the Continent, but it led only to disaster.)

Unfortunately Constable is not to be seen in this fresh mood in most galleries. He could paint as literally and woodenly as any academician might ask: he did indeed labour and over-detail his canvases for a public that was put off by the unconventional appearance of the "impressions." He had no such reputation as Turner, and his enterprise and originality, as seen in the freer pictures, were not similarly applauded. The museums mostly have treasured the academic and larger-scale works. At Worcester, Massachusetts, however, is the swiftly realized sketch of the *Landscape with Windmill*, with its transparent airiness and fresh spontaneity. The "finished" painting from this, also very fine in a heavier way, is in the Neue Pinakothek at Munich. Of the larger



Turner *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* [Courtesy National Gallery, London]

canvases *The Leaping Horse* at Burlington House, London, is one of the cleverest and most animated, and at the same time most solidly structural. The sketch for it is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, which has also the beautifully direct and vivid water-colour *Stoke-by-Nayland*. A more frankly documentary piece in the National Gallery, *The Haywain*, is better known than any of these, is, perhaps, the national favourite.

Joseph Mallord William Turner, born in 1775, was destined to pick up the tradition of English landscape, as established by Wilson and enlarged by Constable (who was actually a year younger), and to develop first a typical mastery of it, then go on to the one great flight into effective abstract painting known in British annals. A prodigious producer of pictures, a strange unsocial man, an uneven genius, he ends by being the one true giant of English visual art. At his imaginative best—when the imaging does not become vaporous and vague—he is a magic artist doing almost incredible things with paint. Before he comes to that wonder he covers the whole lower range, from literal transcripts of the picturesque and the usual pretty English detailed views,

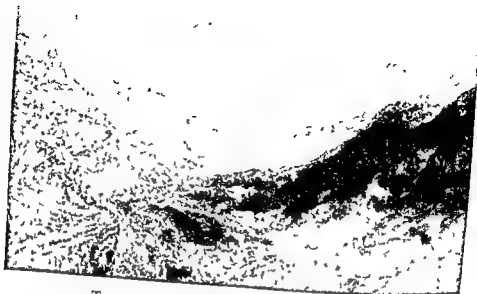
through the constructed thing that parallels the Dutch achievement and Claude, to the romantic interpretation and finally the near-abstract visual invention. It is illuminating that he bridges two literary eras, that of Wordsworth and the romantic one of Byron, Shelley, and Keats.

Turner was a Cockney and a barber's son. He made his way without social favour, by sheer ability and persistence. He remained, through life, almost a recluse, and his asocial ways and unattractive habits earned him the reputation of an eccentric. Nevertheless, he exhibited at the Royal Academy when he was fifteen. In his late years he became a favourite artist of Ruskin, then the most powerful and gifted critic in England—who, indeed, overpraised him to the artist's own ultimate disadvantage. Turner's only interests were in his painting and in a career. He gave himself wholly to increasing his knowledge of nature and to the business of picture-making. By being a solitary, he came to know more of nature than any artist had known before. He had a knack of retaining in visual memory every aspect of tree, rock, grass-blade, and water, along with a phenomenal ability to reconstruct a fleeting larger effect.

At first (after obviously juvenile experiments) his views were literal and topographical. Then he went into a period of solidly constructive painting, for which he learned much from Claude Lorrain, and gave the world many favourite transcripts of the English countryside, among which *Crossing the Brook* and *Richmond Hill* are outstanding.

By 1830 Turner had come to his second method. He cast aside the restraints of "normal" sight. He turned from the literal, to be romantic and dramatic. He recognized new pictorial potentialities in light and colour exploited for their own sake. Soon he was painting pictures far more "impressionistic" than Constable's. At their best, as in *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* or *The Fighting Temeraire*, these canvases have a gorgeous play of light, and a spontaneous grandeur, even while built on sound plastic principles. At other times the structure is dissipated with the subject-matter, as somewhat happens in the famous *Rain, Steam, and Speed*. This almost nebulous picture marks one of the earliest recorded attempts to paint a subject typical of the industrial age. Turner was like that: trying to make sheerest poetry out of a railway train, when everybody else was certain that machinery was destroying romance and beauty. Equally he delighted in painting dirty boats and wharves, littered streets and untidy markets.

In the end his love of colour as such ran away with his judgment. There are too many of the large late pictures that are spineless, structureless, even cha-



Turner. *Simplon Pass* Collection Edward W. Forbes  
 [Photo, courtesy Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University]

otic. One remembers vast Venetian canvases that seem formless and lurid. But in the field of water-colours the lyric impulse resulted in the loveliest opalescent trifles in the entire range of Western painting. The series of Alpine views includes examples of ethereal handling of colours and composing in abstract shadowy fabrics which are utterly delightful. Their luminous, fragile, insubstantial beauty is hardly paralleled even in Oriental portfolios.

Perhaps one must have retained a childlike, romantic tenderness of mind to enjoy these things that are "all mist and mystery"; or it may be, as some of us believe, that occasionally an artist does, by means of colour and pattern, plane and volume, manipulated as near-abstractions, speak directly to faculties nearer the spiritual than the intellectual centres of our being—and that Turner in his most felicitous water-colours achieves this aim. The transcriptive value, the familiar or picturesque aspect of crag and cloud, waterfall or tree, has little to do with our response. Rather the enchanting colour melodies and the slight formal rhythms form a tissue of visual delight, apart from all associative thought.

It is only right to record that some of the soundest modern critics put down this sort of appreciation as self-intoxication. They believe that Turner created a realm in which the yearning can wander and indulge their own day-dream fancies. To this observer it seems rather that Turner has afforded, in a minor mode, a rarely felicitous and legitimately enjoyable experience. Fortunately the water-colours are to be seen in a great many galleries. At the Tate Gallery in London there is a Turner Annex which is positively crammed with them a place of frequent surprises and, for some, of exquisite pleasure.

At the time of his death in 1851—after, characteristically, some years in which sordid drinking bouts, in the lowest surroundings, alternated with periods of feverish creative work—Turner had traversed a mighty arc. From sheerest prose he had gone on to Wordsworthian nature-interpretation, in simple words and familiar images. Then he had turned romantic, was, as he himself wished, the Byron of painting. And finally, in the unsubstantial lyricism, the ethereal unreality of his most personal work, he showed affinity with Shelley. It is England's one major release from literal and earthbound painting. If, in the attempt to be imaginative or lyrical or musical, Turner often lost contact with "objective truth" he nevertheless occasionally fixed in colour a rare quality that speaks with a sure if quiet accent to an increasing audience.

There was in England, even in Turner's time, a painter-mystic who might, under slightly changed conditions, have been one of the greatest visual artists of all time. William Blake, driven partly by poverty, partly by ascetic preference, to avoidance of painting in the larger manner, possessed the surest pictorial sense given to any Englishman. But he had or made, no opportunity to create pictures in the monumental or even the standard fields.

A mystic, a seer, a born rebel (in the materialist view), Blake was farthest from the stream of national development least touched by English practicality and literal-mindedness. Seeing all things from within, counting imaginative vision the truest reality, the sight of the physical eyes a lesser actuality, he penetrated to meanings not vouchsafed to other men. Standing once with Constable before one of the latter's canvases, Blake said "Why, this is not drawing, but inspiration." And Constable, whether through shrewdness or literal-minded misapprehension answered "I meant it for drawing." Blake looked for hidden significances and cosmic revelations—and, so far as mortals may, he trafficked in these values.



Turner *Simplon Pass* Collection Eduard W Forbes  
 [Photo courtesy Fogg Art Museum Harvard University]

otic. One remembers vast Venetian canvases that seem formless and lund. But in the field of water-colours the lyric impulse resulted in the loveliest opalescent trifles in the entire range of Western painting. The series of Alpine views includes examples of ethereal handling of colours and composing in abstract shadowy fabrics which are utterly delightful. Their luminous, fragile, insubstantial beauty is hardly paralleled even in Oriental portfolios.

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Blake *The Spiritual Form of Nelson* [Courtesy National Gallery Millbank, London]

Blake is the author of a relatively small body of small pictures. They are, indeed, hardly more than coloured drawings. There is in them, nonetheless, the soundest spatial sense, the most powerful plastic movement, known to British art. He fixed in his light compositions an extraordinary degree of formal vitality or "order." His pictures, presumably illustrating Bible stories, narrative poems, and world epics, yet the more surely illustrate the artist's own central vision and search.

One saying lies at the heart of his philosophy, and guides his art. "He who sees the infinite in all things, sees God." Once he wrote "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up." To Blake the artist's business was that of opening men's perceptive faculties to a sort of truth that is commonly hidden. As for drawing, he said "Nature has no Outline, but imagination has."

There are other points at which Blake's philosophy—and his drawings—are more like the Oriental than the Western. The need for stillness within the waiting for a spiritual intimation or distillation, the belief that abstraction may serve to reveal more truly than camera-representation—these are reminders of an approach un-Western and alien. He seems to say that there is this divine unity that interests him more than all the pretty, and obvious faces and places and things in the world. In his drawings there is the majesty of that which is remote—and, for those who prefer their pictures familiarly depictive and intellectually definite, a strangeness, and often "distortion."

Blake's biography is uneventful but illuminating. Born to a home in small circumstances, son of a hosier or draper, he learned engraving at fourteen. God and the angels he met repeatedly, from early childhood, and Christ and the prophets. He experienced visions in which the Bible characters appeared to him quite clearly, and thus he found very convenient since it enabled him to dispense with models. He made his insecure living by writing poetry, by engraving his own designs and selling his illustrated writings, and by engraving the works of other artists. At twenty-five he married a woman as poverty-stricken as himself, illiterate but a satisfactory mate for him. She had beauty of looks and of character, she believed implicitly in his visions, and she learned to be his assistant in engraving and colouring. With Catherine at his side, Blake wrote his poems as "spoken by someone in eternity," and designed and engraved happily "with a ladder of angels reaching from the heavens to his cottage." When he died he was so little esteemed that he was buried in a grave with three other paupers in some place lost to record.



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Blake: *The Spiritual Form of Nelson* [Courtesy National Gallery]



Blake *Wrestle Men & Stars Set Together* Engraving from *The Book of Job*  
[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

There are a few known tempera paintings from Blake's hand. Otherwise the list is of water-colours usually with line and of engravings with an! without wash or colour. Blake's method was what we today would term expressionistic. He freely violated nature: indeed he wrote that "natural objects always did and do weaken deaden and obliterate imagination in me. And A man puts a model before him and paints it so neat as to make it a deception. Now I ask any man of sense is that art? In blunter words Blake

distorted. He eliminated detail and background. He further intensified expression by emphasizing abstract rhythm, building structural patterns. Whether it is the engravings for *Job*, or the *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, or *The Wise and Foolish Virgins*, the pattern and rhythm and harmonious order strike the eye before the "meaning."

The obvious linear method immediately links Blake with the Gothic style, which was, of course, out of fashion. That his first assignment, in his apprenticeship days, led him to make drawings of the medieval monuments in Westminster Abbey is not without significance. He is known also to have studied reproductions of works by Michelangelo—that Florentine master who was too great to be held to the Renaissance formulas, who was passionate and Biblical as well as Greek. Like Michelangelo, Blake—and Tintoretto alone to the same degree—manipulated the human body, its directions and weights and postures, for arbitrary effect. Many of his drawings are poems of movement, told wholly in terms of bodies rhythmically disposed. In the art of purest line, engraving, Blake is perhaps the greatest master after Dürer. As the sixteenth-century Germans marked the end of Gothicism on the Continent, so Blake is an isolated throw-back to the "Northern" style in England.

William Blake, despite the modest physical dimensions of his works, is accepted by the twentieth-century moderns as England's most original and most rewarding graphic artist. The direction taken by art theory in recent years gives his picturing more than intrinsic significance, even a prophetic importance—although not without raising paradoxical questions. The moderns—and we all tend to become moderns—believe implicitly in the basic importance of the formal structure in art. They believe that the experience of order, movement, and rhythm should come before the pleasure of familiar subject-matter and lesson and associative recollection. Particularly they discount art that is over-literary, and they have been known to be caustic about Britain's partiality to anecdote and sentiment. It is a paradox then that it is today's moderns who have rediscovered Blake, for no other British artist is so inextricably bound up with literature.

The explanation is that his creative drawings are so endowed with the plastic values that it little matters what subject-matter lies beyond. The moderns after all do not demand that the abstract design element be divorced from representational elements, only that it be in the picture whether objective nature or symbol or narrative is emphasized or not. Blake happens to include literary illustration without impairing in the least the rhythmic and



Blake *The Procession to Calvary* [Courtesy National Gallery London]

formal values indeed makes spatial order and vitalized design reinforce concrete meaning

There is a huge gap between Britain's earliest orthodox master, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Blake. Neither the theories set down in Reynolds's *Discourses* nor his fashionable practice foreshadowed in the slightest this mystic whose works were considered in his own time 'unintelligible' and 'the effusions of a disordered brain.' Blake on his side wrote that Reynolds had been 'hired by Satan to depress art.' After reading the *Discourses* Blake jotted this note in the margin: "The Enquiry in England is not whether a man has Talent and Genius but whether he is Passive and Polite and a Virtuous Ass." Yet this impolite critic and unorthodox genius was born English and never spent a day of his seventy years outside Britain. If Reynolds and his fellows failed in their objective of overcoming insularity, of bringing British art into the great European tradition of creativeness, Blake strangely overrode all traditions and touched on forms of expression that are universal and eternal.

## The March of Realism · The Nineteenth Century

IN THE history of painting the nineteenth century is known as the era of revolutions. In Paris, then the centre of the arts of the Western world, there was a series of cycles, each marked by advance, consolidation, revolt, and overturn. From 1800, when Davidian classicism had firmly established itself, to the rise and decline of impressionism three generations later, excitement followed excitement, "schools" developed, gained international vogue, and were discredited, old revolutions were lost in new.

It is only in the nineteen-thirties that perspective is gained on the four "decisive" movements, dated roughly at 1800, 1830, 1855, and 1875: the classic or neo-classic, the romantic, the realistic, and the impressionist. But now, in retrospect, it is seen that all were parts of a single more extensive phenomenon, the maturing of Renaissance realism. It turns out that, of the four, impressionism alone is epochal. It rises measurably above the others for two reasons: it marked the final fulfilment of the scientific and realistic aims initiated by Giotto, Masaccio, and Leonardo centuries before, and it has left a body of works inventive and lastingly effective, signalized particularly in the canvases of Manet, Pissarro, Monet, and Renoir.

There is, further, this readjustment being made: the one overshadowing revolution of the century takes place at the point where impressionism as a dogma is abandoned, where a new slope is entered upon by men no longer bound by realism, by the tyranny of appearances, men who, while accepting the heritage of scientific colour from the impressionists, turn their backs upon the camera-eye "reality" sought in all the centuries from Raphael to Monet, seeking instead a return to formal excellence and structural integrity, even at the cost of distortion of nature.

The re-orientation in the light of the post-impressionism (or expressionism) of 1880-1930 shows the movements of 1790-1880 to have been merely

phases of that other type of art. The insurrections and doctrines so exciting and so discussed even within our own memory sink back into the routine of past history, as part of a greyness of minor difference and minor manner. The men who had seemed giants—David and Ingres, Delacroix and Gericault, Courbet and Manet, once compared with Raphael and Rembrandt, with Durer and Velazquez—lose stature, are seen as epitomizing minor variations within that one not very important type or phase of painting. It is a man outside all schools and outside France who emerges as the finest flower of avowed realism. Goya. After him the really great figures are Cézanne and Van Gogh.

The nineteenth-century spectacle is still brave and gripping when humanly considered. The incidents are stirring, the characters dramatic. While the cannon are still firing and severed heads dropping into baskets, David overturns the structure of courtly decorative art, destroys the Royal Academy, and "purifies" expression. Then he is exiled by a restored monarch, and Baron Gros, to whom David entrusts the authority and sanctity of classicism, fails as custodian, in the face of romantic successes, and is so contrite that he kills himself. Delacroix, illegitimate issue of the greatest politician of the century, puts through his revolution in the name of Romance, destroying heroic classicism perhaps for ever, but is recognized a half-century later as less a creative insurgent than a reviver of baroque emotionalism.

Courbet then strides through the polite halls of French painting, which are still romantic or lingeringly classic, as a disillusioned and savage materialist, bringing the camera eye to bear mercilessly on sea and woods and animals on workers and prostitutes and sportsmen. Corot and Degas steady a little the gains for clear-seeing naturalism, bringing a new measure of constructive craft, although it is Degas who opposes the turn into impressionism, who in his north-lighted studio eloquently turns up his coat collar at mention of the radicals who work in the open air. Then Pissarro and Monet, vilified and excluded, turn out to be the real victors in the long campaign for scientific seeing and exact statement, capping Renaissance progress.

After them all comes Cézanne, who did not sell a picture till he was forty, whom society would not have permitted to paint if he had not happened to be the son of a banker, who started as a faithful impressionist but recognized that the realists had thrown away a quality of form that was essentially the creative element in picture-art—Cézanne, who terminates one age and initiates another, who ushers in a school that overshadows all those of the preceding two centuries.

It is the continued march of realism that is important historically in the era 1790-1880, whatever the labels. It is realism under four masks, but always with the literalist essentially controlling. With the classicists a correct, Greek-hallowed mask is put on, but beneath there is, nonetheless, the painstaking statement of outward truth, the reverence for verisimilitude. With the romantics the mask is that of emotionalized, theatricalized statement and a loose technique, but without violation of nature as excitedly observed at home or as reported from exotic climes. When the Courbet group arrives—and it temporarily runs away with the label “realist”—there is a show of dropping all masks, it seems to clear the way to the *realist* truth. But it is discovered that something noble and desirable is hidden—or lost—by these materialists. Finally the impressionists fit up their atmospheric mask, behind it devote their effort to aspect-of-the-moment reality, to views fixed according to the latest discovered laws of optics.

In short it is at last recognized that beneath the four masks is the same reverence for things superficially viewed and cleverly transcribed. It is seen that when Cézanne and Van Gogh adopted new *expressive* aims (aided by Whistler and Gauguin who adopted new *decorative* ones) they accomplished the true modern revolution, because then for the first time the direction of effort that had prevailed for three hundred years was reversed. And so the nineteenth-century phases, still labelled for convenience classic, romantic, realistic, and impressionist, are tumbled into one basket tagged “varieties of realism.”

Realism was supposed by some, for a time, to be typically the art of democracy, of levelled classes, and therefore typically the art for the republican age. It was said that the “honest” vision of Courbet and Millet and Manet was to be expected, and applauded, in the time when the kings and courts had been expelled and destroyed, as in France and America, or disciplined and rendered powerless as in England and Belgium.

The lines are not so easily drawn as that. The revolt of the current moderns against realism, for instance, came in places and periods most devoted to democracy. But there is considerable pertinency in the linking of nineteenth-century naturalism, and sentimental realism, with the rise of the middle class and the triumph of materialistic philosophies.

The men made rich by the industrial revolution became the sustaining patrons of art. They came to control not only buying for home decoration

but official museum-collecting. Indirectly they came into control of the academies and art schools. It was, too, at this point that the present system of salons and periodic exhibitions was established: great displays of art-produce spread before the bourgeois buyer, inviting the new seeker after culture to look and to express his opinion. The artificial structure of shows—dealers, critics, and connoisseurs—was thus set up, in an effort to meet the needs and wishes of a new and often untutored class of purchasers.

For the patron, art became sometimes a new and sincerely valued way to pleasure, oftener was a means of conspicuous display. In the other direction—that of the artist, the adjustment of product to demand was, in general, deeply injurious. Buyers, even critics, demanded art intelligible to the least trained faculties. In some countries, England particularly, the familiar, sentimental, and dexterous thing was so thoroughly exalted over any deeply creative expression that three-quarters of a century passes with hardly a mentionable name in the annals of national painting and sculpture.

The thrifty, prosperous, and—according to his lights—honest manufacturer or banker or merchant-prince has made his way up by unimaginative hard work and shrewd calculation. When he spends his money upon works of art he wants pictures that seem honest and clever and unmysterious. He wants art true to familiar aspects of environment, and dexterously contrived. Story-telling in paint he can easily understand, and a bit of affecting sentiment is not out of place in an activity that is, after all, over on the side of Sunday and holiday things. This is the reason for nineteenth-century anecdotal and reproductive painting and sculpture.

It is not out of tune with the scholarly and popular philosophy of the era. Materialism was being put forward as explanation of existence and as guide to personal living. Success philosophies as shallow as the art of Landseer and Frith abound. (It was their predecessor Sir David Wilkie who candidly said "To know the taste of the public, to know what will best please the employer, is, to an artist, the most valuable of all knowledge"—a far cry from the creative independence and the whole-hearted passion of a Rembrandt or an El Greco.) In general the academies got into the hands of the painters who purveyed to the debased demand.

It was a long time before science, which through the inventor's laboratory and the application of mechanical power to manufacture made possible the machine age, was visibly reflected in works of art. Until the opening of the twentieth century the new and exciting structure of architecture was car-



fully hidden behind masks fashioned from building styles long since dead. The new mass-produced commodities, which might have been expected to take on a characteristic beauty out of the nature of the shaping tools, and out of the ways of living in the machine age, were instead ornamented with motives faithfully copied from the superseded manual crafts. And in the figurative arts, until the very end of the century, subject-matter could not be taken from the life of the times. It was not until after the World War that typical mass interests, such as the life of the workingman or the lessons of socialism, were considered suitable themes for painting.

The technique of the impressionists marked the one point at which the graphic arts received a notable impetus from the scientific laboratory. When colour was understood by artists as broken-up light, a new resource was discovered and capitalized. The impressionists then pushed the logic of the camera-eye and the understanding of natural lighting to a conclusion impossible in any earlier era, and therefore typically of the new age. Otherwise the scientific mastery of nature that had been epochal for man in his major activities—war, work, communication, transportation, recreation—had comparatively negligible influence upon contrived art.

Political change and thought were more truly reflected in the art of the various phases at those moments when kings and emperors temporarily came back to power. David's gesture of purifying painting, his destruction of all that was courtly and trivial in French picturing, had been a sincere attempt to express a new democratic ideology. In seeking models for that neo-classic republican art he and his followers actually dressed painting in the idioms of Republican Rome. They depicted the triumphs of democracy in the ancient capital, and thereby symbolically celebrated the victories of the *citoyens* of Paris. But when Napoleon turned democracy into imperialism, they as easily slipped over into celebrating in terms of Imperial Rome.

Napoleon wanted the Empire signalized in suitable monuments, and he commanded the painters to create a worthy new style, whence some of the most deplorable heroic-bombastic art in existence. It was the grandeur of Rome that led to his building of the Arc de Triomphe at the end of the Champs-Élysées.

Louis XVIII and Charles X made feeble attempts to restore the ornamental, even the baroque sort of thing. Charles believed that disaster had overtaken France because Louis XVI had mistakenly given ground to the democrats and he set out to restore absolutism, planning a monarchical art to match.

But a six-year reign proved too short for the consummation. In general art and politics may be said to have parted company when he abdicated.

Henceforth it is, for better or for worse, the age of individualism. In the end art will gain by the circumstance. But the record of futility, of uncreativity, over so much of the world, for so many decades to follow, is evidence enough that the artist did not know what to do with his freedom.

The arts did, however, become international—which may be counted an effect of science—and no longer will climatic and geographic conditions have a determining influence. When the next style of architecture comes in it will be recognizably one expression in America and Germany, in France and Russia, in England and Japan. The machine, having spelled the doom of handicraft in all but the most precious forms of manufacture, will determine throughout the world the style marks of all designed commodities. Hardly less will painting and sculpture be re-created in forms nearer the universally expressive, and less local, than ever before. But that will be long after the close of the story of the nineteenth century and of realism.

A bird's-eye view of art in Europe in the year 1800 would reveal that a certain number of minor and since unheralded painters, particularly in France, England and Holland, had foreseen a market for literal and sentimental realism, that they had ignored alike the millinered art of the courtly and aristocratic circles and the purified sort brought in by the classicists. If their reputations for significance have not lasted, they yet were surpassingly popular in their time, and they should have a special interest for us of today because their works were the ancestors of what is still our most popular form of art, appearing annually on our calendars, as pretty girls' heads on the covers of our monthly magazines, as genre studies on the covers of our weeklies. Greuze and Vigée-Lebrun were of this ancestral company in France, Sir David Wilkie in England, and sundry Hollanders.

In Paris in 1800 the Versailles cargo had been safely jettisoned. Fragonard was to die of neglect and a broken heart in 1804. David had already been dictator for a decade. But not one of the neo-classicists was destined to approach the popular success, the bourgeois success long since achieved by that outstanding trifle with paint, Jean-Baptiste Greuze. Even in the days of the Great Kings he had been the darling of the French middle class, and hardly less esteemed by the English. He could build up a sentimental bit with irresistible tenderness and he could slick over an empty or prurient subject



Goya: *Don Ignacio Omulryan y Rourera*  
[Courtesy William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City]

with the most virtuous show of artistry. His masterpieces are known in millions of reproductions. *The Girl with Doves*, *Innocence*, *The Village Bride*, and *The Broken Pitcher*.

Greuze's sometime pupil, Mme. Marie Anne Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun, was doing immensely popular sentimental portraits, photographically correct and highly coloured, from the later years of the monarchy—she was an intimate of Marie Antoinette—through the period of the Revolution (though outside France, for her health), on through the Empire, and even into the reign of the last restored Louis. She was famous throughout Europe, be-

longed to four academies, and is still a best-seller in all art's marketplaces.

George Morland is a name from this time still revered in England. He was outstanding in a group of realists who specialized in household and barnyard genre, beside the authentic landscape art of Constable and Turner, and the final flare-up of modish portraiture, in Lawrence. Morland exhibited at the Royal Academy at the age of ten, and he turned out four thousand canvases before he died young in 1804, of drink and—some say—of contrition over betraying a great artist's talents. His *Interior of a Stable* and *Pigs and The Alehouse Door* are typical. All three are favourites still with that part of the British public that takes to that kind of art.

After him David Wilkie was to carry on the trade in sentimental-natural realism and anecdote-picturing, and these two point forward only too accurately to the loss of all but illustrational values in mid-century, and to the total dissolution of pictorial structure, in Landseer and Frith and then Millais.

These all are artists who did not have to wait for the romantic insurgent Delacroix before knowing how to dramatize painting for popular audiences, or have to await Courbet's pronouncements before painting details of nature just as they are. The point of the matter here is that there was wholly outside the succession of recorded nineteenth-century revolutions, an enormously successful industry concerned with the production of sentimental pictures, within any definition of realism. The whole inordinately popular line, from Morland to Landseer and Alma-Tadema, from Greuze to Cazin and Meissonier, is a middle-class phenomenon, signifying the change of standards due to shifting of picture-buying money into the pockets of a commercial class.

But in 1800, outside all the countries so far mentioned in the chapter, there was an artist who had independently developed realism to an unprecedented importance, who stands today as the greatest figure among all who are called realists. Goya. He had a camera-eye, and he was free of all illusions about adorning the truth. But he was a born painter, and he added to accurate seeing and candid statement an understanding of structure, of a sort unknown since Rembrandt.

Goya is outside the routine history of the painting of the eighteenth to nineteenth century as surely as is Greuze or Morland, but for an opposite reason. He forestalls Courbet and teaches Delacroix, and he practises something very like impressionism before broken colour and scientific optics are heard of. He overrides all the varieties of realism which are later to be the noted dis-

coveries of French and therefore of European art, before the controversial distinctions are made. He is the most vital realist of them all. Where others were to be devoted to verisimilitude for its own sake, he made it an instrument (the realist's only legitimate excuse for being). He had a native interest in character, he added satire, he imaged brilliantly.

Francisco Goya was born as early as 1746, but he seems not to have come to the maturity of his artistic power until well along in life. Then by sheer vigour and pictorial honesty he pushed aside the weak native and imported court artists in Madrid. He had earlier done a great deal of hack work, ending with years given to making cartoons for tapestries.

Personally—and it shows in his art—he was a libertine and a reckless and violent adventurer, an audacious egotist and a sceptic. In youth, at Saragossa, he defied the authorities of the Inquisition, and was forced to flee from the Churchmen. In Madrid he got into love-scrapes time and time again, and once was stabbed by a jealous rival and left for dead, but revived and fled the police. In Rome he barely escaped execution after he had been foiled in an attempted abduction of a girl from a nunnery, was exiled back to Spain instead. He seemed on the way to settling down, and married the sister of the then court painter at Madrid. But soon his relations with the court ladies were so notorious that one of them, the famous Duchess of Alba, was banished, Goya loyally following. But the king missed him and recalled the pair, and Goya was made court painter.

With the fall of the House of Bourbon, Goya seems to have gone over easily in loyalty to the French invader, Joseph Bonaparte, although he then painted and etched the world's most sincere and most terrible pictorial exposé of the horrors of warfare, after the siege. He equally facilely turned-coated to the side of a restored Spanish king, who said he knew he ought to guillotine so traitorous a subject, but guessed he wouldn't, his art being so good. So Goya resumed his duties as court painter. A short time later he asked permission to visit in France, there he settled, and died in 1828, too old to care about the controversies over art then raging. He had made himself a greater figure than any painter then living.

Something of the violence, vividness, and audacity of Goya's way of living carries over into his painting and etching. The scope of his subject-matter is immense—from orthodoxly religious picturing to the most savage satires on the Church, portraits of every sort, from innocent children to ornamental royal groups and slyly cruel revelations of the characters of prominent but



Goya *Majas on a Balcony* [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

vicious people story pictures that castigate mankind for its follies and bestiality nudes bull fights balcony pieces cartoons caprices He observed and brooded and scorned mankind and put down a record of what he saw and thought in paint

His portraits of the Spanish king and queen are among the curiosities of painting He apparently maliciously showed up the rulers for what they were the king a stupid and lazy incompetent the Queen Maria Luisa a

greedy and hardened courtesan. Here psychological penetration and cruel satire came to a remarkable union. Apparently the liberty of the artist was fully respected. He remained a court favourite. And at least Goya was no less honest in painting himself. The same cunning hand could, however, depict a little boy with tenderness and insight.

Portraiture of a different but hardly less masterly sort is the *Maja Nude*, a figure as voluptuously felt and transcribed as any in European painting. The companion picture of the *Maja Clothed*, also a portrait of the Duchess of Alba, is equally voluptuous and winning. This same lady, as well as others discarded, is later savagely held up to ridicule. Indeed, when Goya does not like a model he is as candid in advertising the sitter's shortcomings as he had been in glorifying the savoured charms and beauty of the duchess.

In this depreciative direction, one may easily be sated with his cruelty and his nastiness. There is a plethora of voluptuaries and harlots and fiends in his later pictures. They deal fully and mercilessly with cannibals and idiots, firing squads and torturers, cripples and executioners, corpses and fetuses. One could make from his works a terrible album of perversion and unhealthiness. Yet there runs through his dealing with abnormality and the vicious such a burning scorn for the stupid and the avaricious that one comes away from the exhibit with some of the purged emotion that follows great tragedy. And Goya has just enough of poetry of statement to justify the descent into the terrifyingly evil and gruesome.

His war pictures, in both painting and etching, are among the most moving and horrifying documents about man's inhumanity known to art. At the time of their making, the artists of France are competing to glorify the Napoleonic Wars for their hero-master. Goya forgets heroes and rulers; shows the bleeding, shell-torn bodies, the piles of nauseating corpses, the captives being shot down, even the women being violated. The grandiose and patriotic fiction of war is punctured, the sordid reality set forth, grimly, truthfully. He nowhere sets himself up as moralist; but no one would remember, after perusing his *Disasters of War*, the copybook sentimentalisms about dying gloriously for one's country. Cruelty, butchery, and gore—these persist in the memory.

There is a great deal of Goya's art, nevertheless, that escapes the terrible or the unhealthy note. There is plentiful satire with the humour stressed, not without a biting contempt for man's intentions. There are canvases in which the normal and the beautiful are intensified and glorified. And through it all

run an admirable vigour and an inescapable vividness. Goya's canvases are outstandingly *alive* in any gallery.

And finally—what makes him an artist beyond so many who have verisimilitude and vividness and nothing more—he rises at times to a beautiful mastery of the architectonics of picture-making. In a figure-piece like the *Majas on a Balcony* there is notable plastic organization. In some of the war pictures there is the same expert handling of volume and space, of plane and depth. The pictures of bull fights are disposed on the canvas with extraordinary deftness, with a balance of formal elements, yet with full validity given to every illustrational requirement. The portraits vary from a great many negligently put down figures (too often paraded indiscriminately as master pieces now that Goya's name is celebrated) to likenesses expertly disposed in the two-dimensional field. With the portraits one always comes back to the exceptional livingness of the face and figure.

And so this genius a little takes off the edge of novelty from the realism of the French of the nineteenth century. This vitally realistic yet cunningly constructive painter is at the beginning of the age of individualism, already a giant. Spanish painting had been all but dead since Velazquez, when suddenly Goya appeared. He is said to have been Spain's brainiest man, in that century of trouble and degradation and certainly he was her most passionate, most furious, most savage commentator in paint.

One has only to place (or imagine) a vivid Goya canvas beside one of David's frigid pictures to know how sterile was the so-called classicism of 1800 in France—and, for that matter, in Germany, and, later, in England.

Jacques-Louis David has his historical place. He rode in on the wave of public indignation and intolerance that demanded destruction of everything suggesting the old court life. He was able to destroy the Watteau-Fragonard tradition. But when he became art dictator, he decreed a type of painting just as narrow and special and unconnected with full-blooded living. He had studied at the French Academy in Rome, and had a scholar's vision of what noble art should be.

David and his fellows had the best intentions in the world. They could see that the glittering, baroque, and erotic art of Versailles represented only a fringe of society, a fringe now happily gone. They did not see that in purifying art according to the ideals of ancient Rome they were throwing out not only glitter, insincerity, and pretence but also all living content and social





Goya *Don Francisco Son of Carlos II Escorial Palace*

significance. Their picturing is hard, cold, mechanical, and intellectual. They took the Roman bas-relief as their model for the effect a painting should have. They suffered also from the insistence of the political authorities that every picture be patriotic.

The heroic story-art might be varied with portraits or with bits illustrating the Revolution like David's often reproduced *Death of Marat*. The equally famous *Mme Récamier* in the Louvre has the merit of novelty; is superior to

the lifeless—yes, the insupportably bad—celebrated things like his *Paris and Helen*, *The Sabines*, and *The Oath of the Horatii*. Some observers profess to see in David's canvases a mastery of plastic architectonics similar to Poussin's, and therefore feel that he deserves a major position in the annals of creative art in France. Rather his place would seem political and pivotal, his contribution intrinsically second-rate.

Others who tried with intellectual might and main to wed classical mythology and antique purity to revolutionary impulse—or, later, to Napoleonic propaganda—were Gerard, whose *Cupid and Psyche* is still seen commonly in reproduction, and Baron Gros, a born panoramic illustrator, who could put the more military feeling into his canvases because he had been to war. He specialized in celebrating the exploits of Napoleon. It was he who charged with upholding the banner of classic purity after David's exile, felt that he had been lax in enforcing authority, and so lay down in a ditch and drowned himself, leaving art to shift for itself.

Pierre Prud'hon softened the sculptural classicism of his fellows and was less political-minded. He orthodoxly returned to approved archaeological fields for his subject-matter, but he had a Correggio-like taste for the voluptuousness of the flesh. He was the author of a painting which became prodigiously popular in the late nineteenth century, *The Zephyrs Carrying Away Psyche*.

But it was Ingres, a late follower of David (born 1780 and living until 1867), who brought the greatest talent to the neo-classicist group. He had hardly started his career when the tide of romanticism broke over artistic France, and he became the bulwark of conservatism in its fight to keep "the youngsters" from ruining art.

Probably the reactionary position forced on Ingres hurt his individuality and inventiveness. In any case his early pictures are the more original, the portraits of the period 1805-1807 touching the top mark. The *Mlle Ruïère* and the *Mme Ruïère*, both in the Louvre, and the *M. Granet* at Aix-en-Provence, are marked by an exceptional sense of architectural design, with a fine understanding of arranged planes. But too much contact with actual survivals of ancient art—he lived in Rome and Florence nearly twenty years—evidently hardened his technique and apparently lessened his feeling for plastic order. When he returned to Paris in 1824 he became very popular with, on the one hand pseudo-classic pedantic allegories, and on the other, photographically exact nudes like *The Source* and *The Turkish Bath*. This



*Ingres Portrait of a Gentleman [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]*

was the period of the daguerreotype and even a classic realist must meet the competition of the camera

There was one other neo-classicist who gained an international reputation, the German Anton Raphael Mengs. He was an intimate of the archaeologist Winckelmann in Rome and his return to Roman purity antedated that of David (Chronologically Mengs belongs to the age of the baroque, since he lived from 1728 to 1779) But his paintings are generally recognized today

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as hard and academic. They are a perfect parallel to the equally celebrated sculptures of the Italian Canova and the Danish Thorwaldsen, who fixed the men and women of their time in the attitudes of Greek gods and goddesses and lovers, with a strange mixture of antique stiffness and modern photographic exactitude.

Canova occasionally rose above the rather frigid level of the neo-classic sculpture, and there is an illuminating sidelight to be had from study of his "portrait" of Pauline Borghese, Napoleon's sister. It is rigged with a portrait head, a Greek goddess's body, nude to the thighs, and a period couch with photographically treated pillows, in marble.

Architecture, of course, had its share in the Classic Revival, and churches and capitols, homes and banks and railway terminals, were to revert occasionally throughout the nineteenth century to Greek temple prototypes. Then too the plague of Roman arches of triumph reappeared and spread.

David said in his last years that he well knew that his sort of painting was too severe to please the French public for long, and he prophesied the return to a style more colourful and familiar. Already in 1820 the question was being bandied about "Who will save us from the Greeks and the Romans?"

When the reaction came, it swung all the way from the coldness and impersonality of David and Ingres, and from their emphasis upon expressive linear draughtsmanship, to over-emotional, heated, and confusedly dramatic statement, and to melodramatic theme. Not all the pictures, of course, are overdone, but the effort seems, in the average, to have been for colour, movement, and drama at any cost.

Eugène Delacroix and Théodore Géricault, the two leaders of the French romantic movement, owed a great deal to studies in England where the romantic poets were then ascendant. They graciously acknowledged a debt, moreover, to Constable, and the young British painter Bonington, who died untimely at twenty-six, in 1828, was their companion in Paris.

Delacroix is the towering figure, having left a great number of illustrational pictures, some almost as monumental in dimensions as those of the Davidian heroic school. He shamelessly theatricalized his subjects. In manner of painting he reverted to the baroque tendencies of Rubens and the nervous touch of Watteau.

Today Delacroix's canvases seem forced and turgid. He seldom brought the tumultuous movement into a poised framework. He is seen to have



Delacroix *Christ on the Sea of Galilee* [Courtesy Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore]

capitalized movement for its own sake, on the surface, failed to curb its pull and strain within plastic order. In that particular he falls far short of Rubens's mastery or Tintoretto's. He is an exciting figure in his reckless insurgency, and he opened doors that had been injuriously closed by the classicists. He has a place in the second rank of nineteenth-century masters, but he is no longer held in the almost fanatical reverence that was his a generation ago.

There has been a determined effort, within this decade, to exalt Géricault as the more important initiator of the romantic revival, at the expense of Delacroix. But the pictures do not seem to warrant such reranking. Géricault was hardly less literary and no less sentimentally emotional than Delacroix. He put forward the free use of colour and helped bring vigour back to painting. His *chef-d'œuvre*, *The Raft of the Medusa*, is sheer melodrama. There are few of his canvases, indeed, in which one can take even that

measured sort of pleasure that may be had from a score of Delacroix's things, say *The Bark of Dante* in the Louvre, or the *Christ on the Sea of Galilee* in the Walters Gallery at Baltimore, or the *Oriental Lion Hunt* (more melodramatic) at Chicago. Very exceptional, and a masterpiece in its slighter, impressionistic way, is Delacroix's portrait of Paganini in the Phillips Memorial Gallery at Washington. In the other direction he turned, in his search for rich local colour, to the Orient, and found movement and drama in the harems and the desert warriors and the exotic hunts. It was the beginning of a sort of journalistic Orientalism that has been much exploited by minor painters and major dealers ever since.

There were followers of the two romantic masters, but they count little. Perhaps more to be preferred than any of the lesser Frenchmen was the German Adolph von Menzel, if only because he accepted the baroque implications of the romantic manner and used it theatrically to memorialize the regal splendour of the Kaiser's court. In England, Turner was painting until the mid-century, and remains the most authentic romantic of them all.

The labels are inexact, of course—the Germans are likely to speak of "the romantic classicists" to distinguish the later group who warm up their figures, rendering them less frigidly statuesque than David's. Even Ingres pushes over into a variant category. And it is easy for any eye to recognize that between romanticism and what the Victorians called realism there is no sharp dividing-line. There are artists who affect the freedom and colour and movement introduced by Delacroix and Géricault, who yet curb the passion and tumult, and go on to exactitude of statement and "commonness" of theme with the realists.

One of the transitional figures is Chassériau, who studied with Ingres, was strongly influenced by Delacroix, and had independence enough to push ahead in his own way. He might have been a very great decorative painter if he had not died in early middle age, and indeed he was the teacher of Puvis de Chavannes, destined to become France's nearest approach to a successful muralist.

Jean François Millet similarly bridges two schools, but it is the romantics who have taught him, the new realists who claim him. In the end he summed up neatly, in one precept, the error of the Delacroix school from which he had stemmed: "Keep away from the theatres!"

Millet never rose to a secure sense of picture-building, and he is known rather for his honesty and sentiment and homely truth. He was born of a





Millet *The Goose Girl* [Courtesy Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore]

peasant family, and he loved the earth, particularly in its calmest moods. When he did not labour the social or literary allusion he was honestly affecting. For our sentimental moments he is one of the most agreeable of painters. *The Sower*, *The Angelus*, and *The Gleaners* continue to be favourites, and *The Man with the Hoe* has exceptional interest because it inspired one of the most popular poems of a generation ago.

Millet is sometimes counted, because of his associations in later life, a member of the Barbizon group, which is more correctly known as a school of pure landscape-painters. The name is taken from the village of Barbizon at the edge of the Forest of Fontainebleau, just outside Paris, where a band of lesser artists made the discovery of an intrinsic and transcribable loveliness in nature.

Landscape-painting for its own sake had been practically unknown in

France, had been, up to 1830, a specialty of the Low Countries artists, of the Germans, and of the English. The only Frenchmen involved in its history, Poussin and Claude, had been expatriates in Rome, and in their day landscapes were not painted from nature but constructed out of stereotyped parts in the studio. They saw nature, moreover, through the haze of Arcadia. The gardens and parks peopled with courtiers and mock shepherdesses, from the brushes of Watteau and Fragonard, are hardly within the definition and the classicists had found nothing in the out-of-doors to remind them of ancient virtues.

The studio painter of Paris—all the Barbizon brethren were Parisians—found in his way, as regards direct portrayals of nature, barriers hardly to be understood today. An artist then simply could not see the landscape in its own right. To observe a tree was to observe how it illustrated Claude's "treatment," or Ruysdael's, or Constable's. Landscape could be thought of as a state of mind, a scene of dramas of love, or a "construction", never as the thing seen daily with the common eye. The British were far ahead in this. Constable is reported to have said of his Parisian contemporaries "They know no more of nature than cabhorses do of meadows" (But only a few years earlier Constable had been constrained to place a violin against foliage in the open to prove to his British contemporaries that trees were not all a rich brown.)

When the Barbizon members accomplished the epochal advance of depicting actual places, actual trees, actual lighting they were, then, introducing a novelty. In 1830 to carry one's easel into the open air was plain insanity.

Théodore Rousseau, the good rebel who led the fight for the new outdoor art—there was a fight, of course, and in this case there was incredibly stupid persecution at the hands of the Academicians—Rousseau happened to be a literalist, and so Barbizon got off to a naturalistic start. But others of the school were at the far extreme of lyric and twilight statement. There is indeed, every shade of realism within the membership, from prosaic botanic accuracy to misty and moody "interpretation." In short, the new realists and the old romantics—now the recognized conservatives—are, in the out-of-doors, friends and co-workers.

If Corot is essentially a Barbizon painter, then Barbizon is poetic. Lately there has been a disposition to treat Corot as a separate phenomenon, a master above all schools, and since his figure-paintings, long obscured, are now considered to constitute his larger claim to genius he deserves more than



Inness *Evening at Medfield* [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

a paragraph incidental to a school. His work will be described presently. Within the circle, Daubigny followed Rousseau in his fidelity to the tree and the brook, as outwardly seen, while Diaz went to the opposite extreme of mysteriously shadowed landscapes accented with light-flecked trees. Jules Dupré was a middle-of-the-road figure, occasionally poetic, more often literal, but with a tendency to set out the calmer effects of nature.

Constant Troyon specialized in animal-filled landscapes, and indeed he was so successful with them that he set up a studio-factory in which he painted groups of oxen or cows or sheep and hired assistants to fill out the sky and field backgrounds. Nevertheless, there is pleasing pictorial composition to Troyon's credit, in a few canvases in the vein of the *Oxen Going Out to Plough* in the Louvre. Charles Jacque, one of the last of the Barbizon men (1834-1894), is known especially for his gentle landscapes with sheep.

In general the Barbizon development is historically rather than intrinsically significant as preparation for the impressionists. The several members opened a road of art that has been much travelled in all the hundred years since Rousseau proclaimed war on "studio concoctions," in the name of a forest. In a sense the Frenchmen universalized landscape, as the Dutch, working in

a flat country and a minor key, had not done. The idea was picked up in Germany and Scandinavia and America. And indeed the American George Inness was as near a master of this limited mode as any. He brought a good sense of surface composition, and occasionally built into his transcripts of what he called "civilized landscapes," as against untamed, a notable measure of three-dimensional structure.

It is said among the French that Corot was the painter of three thousand pictures, of which ten thousand were sold to Americans. No other artist has been so imitated, none other's works so commonly manufactured under forged signature. Corot was inordinately popular in his own later life. With the "higher authorities" he was out of favour at the beginning of the new century. Now again, after a resiting of masters, he takes a place just below the top Frenchmen, due not to the popular "poetic" landscapes but to the figure-pieces that have gradually been brought up out of museum basements and gallery storerooms. They are found to be endowed with plastic significance, a quality largely sacrificed to glamour and softness in the idyllic scenes of woods and lakes and nymphs.

Seldom in history has there been such a Jekyll-and-Hyde performance. On the one hand are the compact, soundly organized, plastically orchestrated pieces, usually built around one dominating figure. On the other are those vaporous, hazy landscapes, dripping with sentiment and literary allusion—the very embodiment of the gloaming.

Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot was born in 1796. He did not have any idea of being a revolutionary or an innovator, and he made no violent controversial gestures like those of Delacroix and Courbet. He was spared too the poverty, neglect, and deprivation suffered by Rousseau, Millet, Daumier, and other contemporaries (though not, till he was nearly sixty, by earnings from art).

He wanted only to paint. He happened to have a father who, after some vain attempts to confine the lad within his own draper's business, gave him an allowance and his blessing. So it did not trouble him to the point of starvation or suicide that he could not sell one picture in the next thirty years. He worked much in Italy. But he had a villa not far from Barbizon, and by sympathy and a like aim he came into contact with the Rousseau-Diaz-Dupré group. He lived a quiet life, felt comfortable with little so long as he could paint, received the insignia of the Legion of Honour when he was fifty, and was a popular success at sixty.



Corot *Mother and Child* [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]



Corot. *In the Studio* Collection Joseph Widener, Ellens Park, Pennsylvania

The landscapes are all mood all alike painted in silvery light, all the expression of one dream of what nature might be. They are not transcripts like Rousseau's or Daubigny's, indeed one cannot place any one of them as French or Italian. Rather they all are Elysian—though the labels spell out *Souir enir of Normandy* or *Breton Landscape* or *Environs de Naples*.

Whatever the place, the time is always dawn or twilight. There is usually an impressionistic framework of diaphanous trees, and between them a glimpse of lake or river, or a dew-drenched field. The foreground is likely to show two or three scattered impressionistic nymphs, very poetically in-

distinct (They have something more than a literary function, however. By contrast they give scale to the masses of trees, and often enough a needed accent at the centre of interest.)

These vaporous, luminous, misty things are not very deep as art, are not a little tricky, are sentimentally rather than solidly appealing. Still they have a minor, a shadowy place in our affections. Merely as landscape they surpass in appeal the works left by the true Barbizon brethren. And beside them are those figure-pictures that prove Corot's plastic mastery—when he did not give in to his nostalgic twilight reveries.

An occasional landscape canvas marks a return to structural solidity, to planned plastic integration. Such is *The Bridge at Mantes* in the Louvre, which at the same time holds to the atmospheric, blurred-vision method, or the "harder" *View of Subiaco* at Kansas City. In general the series of views of Rome, much earlier in period, is more architectural, and therefore nearer to an initial impulse out of Claude Lorrain.

But it is when the canvas is given up to a full or half-figure, often a *Girl Reading* or a reclining woman, that the melodies are played with fuller exploitation of volume-space relationships, of plane organization, and of textural enrichment. In his understanding of texture or pattern as an item in the plastic synthesis, Corot has affinity with Cézanne and Matisse. Corot was one of the earliest of the French to realize that the painter must see the encompassing light and not merely the light-struck object. "Le Pere Corot," as he was known to his younger associates—he was the senior of Rousseau by sixteen years, of Millet by eighteen—lived on till 1875, still painting. He was then a great success, getting large sums for repeated variations of his lyric, melting woods-scenes, but he was destined to return to the lists of the masters through the "slighter" figure-paintings then forgotten. It is, of course, the poetical things that have been endlessly imitated and forged.

One might easily argue Corot into either the camp of the romantics or that of the realists. It is said that he was at a loss without a model before him, which sounds like realism. But with his grasp of structure, he transformed his pictures into creations not seriously to be confused with the products of those mid-century painters who might best be described as "desperately realistic."

Gustave Courbet was the propagandist and self-conscious fighter for the school. The dullest of the academists were now entrenched in the places

of power, and it was one of them who scornfully dismissed something of Courbet's with the epithet "realistic." He immediately wrote up over his studio door "G. Courbet, Realist." And he vociferously maintained that the whole aim of painting was to set down without reserve what nature presented to the eye.

There can be no doubt that so sincere and ringing a challenge to artificiality had a healthful influence upon French art. Insofar as Courbet stood by his own precepts, reproducing as closely as he could all nature's imperfections and violences and chance aspects, he failed to create works of significance (and few celebrated names appear so often in celebrated galleries on paintings worthless and empty). Fortunately, he was to a small degree a born painter, and forgetting his "mission" and his precepts, he occasionally achieved a canvas with lasting merits. But his great service to art is less in actual canvases than in the jolting of men's loyalty away from classic and romantic prepossessions. He thus opened the way for the impressionists.

To understand how bound up with unnatural effects French painting had been—one says "French" because Goya had opened a way long before, albeit he had been overlooked—it is necessary to go back to the two methods of seeing typical of David and of Delacroix. When the classicists, to take a familiar instance, painted the horsemen and horses in a war picture, they studied and got down with unchallengeable correctness the outline of each figure of man or animal, along with exact details of uniform, weapon, saddle, bridle, and mane. They made each part stand still separately for copying. Also, true to memories of antique statues, they set out each individual figure, free of other figures and background.

The romantics reversed this procedure: they interwove figures—as they would be interwoven if one were looking at an actual battle. Detail was lost, characteristic outlines stressed, others obscured. What came clear to the eye was a sense of movement, a lively, colourful illustration.

Nature had been forced to stand still for the classicists, each little piece photographed separately, and the pieces then assembled, coldly, according to a reasoned plan. The result was mechanical, chilling. If one looked intently at any single part of the canvas it was "real," correct, but the reality disappeared once one remembered that it is movement that makes life. But the romanticists forced nature, so to speak, to pass before one's eyes on the run. There was then no mechanical assembling of correctly conveyed static bits. The reality was in the conveyed sense of movement, in emphasis upon action.



Corot *Villa of the Parasol Pine*

[Courtesy Wilham Rockhull Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City]

In both cases nature had, Courbet rightly inferred, been forced to an artificial static pose with the Davidians, to an artificial animation and theatricalism with Gericault and Delacroix, and especially with the Orientalists who followed them. There must be, Courbet decided, a still more real way of seeing. The newly popular camera helped to show both David and Delacroix to be wrong. Courbet decided upon camera truth for painting.

Even monumental pictures would henceforth deal with easily observable things, and Courbet consecrated immense canvases to commonplaces. The academicians asked: What is the sense of grandeur in size, if the subject is not grand—an incident on Parnassus, an illustration from the Bible, or an historical episode? But Courbet painted huge pictures of weddings, funerals, home life, his own studio. They had an effect though it is not clear that any one of them survives as a masterpiece. It is indeed, necessary to search through the smaller canvases to see Courbet intrinsically justified perhaps best in the self-portrait at the age of forty-eight, or the *Baudelaire* in the museum at Montpellier.

Courbet was peasant-born, a thick-skinned and successful climber, a forceful egotist. He made history, but his pictures will more and more disappear from the museums. He threw out the science of picture-construction along with the artificialities. He studied faithfully, for a time, but the masters he chose to copy were Ribera and Hals and Velazquez.

Edouard Manet picked up the tradition of direct seeing, suffered, like Courbet, unqualified abuse from those who wanted conformance to hallowed custom, turned out a very great deal of moderately interesting, substantially illustrative work, and at times added some decorative understanding to his equipment as competent realist. He seems often on the verge of going on to a revolutionary way of art: almost grasps the long-lost principle of mural technique, almost suggests a near-Oriental pattern-based art. But in the end it is only a pleasing individual method he achieves, within the true realistic school.

He flattens his composition, and works in full-lighted planes and solid masses of shadow, and he deals in broad areas of colour. But he fails to capitalize the plane organization, places his figures negligently in the frame—naturally, as they come, the realist might say—and fails entirely to achieve that ordered design which the Orientals, dealing in like flattened materials had woven into gorgeously sensuous patterns.

As picture-maker Manet rises far above Courbet's level, there is a room at the Metropolitan Museum in New York wherein his *In the Boat* and his *Woman with a Parrot* instructively hang close by a selection of Courbet's unorganized, actual transcripts. Obviously Manet is a painter, the other an accomplished photographer. But one has only to turn and look at a Cézanne (or even a Whistler) to know that design means something else again.

Manet was born in 1832. He was therefore at the impressionable age of eighteen when Courbet threw down his challenge to the romantics and caused a sensation by espousing illustration of things as they are. Manet studied, too, just those past artists bound to reinforce his naturalism: Hals, Ribera, Zurbarán, Velazquez, and Goya. By the time he was twenty-two he was recognized as a fighter at Courbet's side. In 1863 he achieved a *succès de scandale* through the exhibition of the *Dejeuner sur l'Herbe*, or *Lunch on the Grass*. It was neither first-class realism nor good designed picturing, a fact that was wholly overlooked in the excitement over the subject-matter: two dressed gentlemen and two undressed ladies together in a park. Because the thing was daringly new it enraged the conservatives and equally drew the



Manet *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*. L. m. r. [Archives Photographiques]

young radicals to Manet's side. Actually the painter had mixed his new naturalism with some very artificial conventions taken without understanding from the Spaniards—particularly the excessive black shadowing. And the whole composition, considered in the light of later open-air ideals, is a ridiculous bit of studio-posing against a set-up of stage scenery.

Nevertheless this became the most famous and notorious picture of the nineteenth century, and Manet was thenceforward a figure and a battle-cry. Largely for his sake Napoleon III created the *Salon des Refusés* so that the public might have a chance to compare radical art with the officially approved sort—a move that gave heart and help to many a shamelessly persecuted innovator and to plenty of incompetents and charlatans as well.

Two years later Manet again shook the art world to its foundations by exhibiting his almost equally famous and notorious *Olympia*, a nude portrait of a typical Parisian *demi-mondaine*. Because the elder artists and the

moralists were collectively shocked, the young realists were sure again that here was the revolutionary new way. Again it was overlooked that the picture had little virtue beyond fidelity to nature and utter candour. Obviously inspired by Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* and Goya's *Maja Nude*, it lacked the poetic loveliness and plastic mastery of the one and the transcribed physical healthiness and sensuous charm of the other. A naked, pampered harlot—hardly more.

Manet is sometimes—erroneously, it now seems clear—credited with the introduction of the methods of colour-use which are at the heart of impressionism. But it was not until after 1870 that he became impressionistic. That is, he is follower of Pissarro and Monet rather than a discoverer and their teacher. As the excitement over his "shockers" fades, he is recognized as a good painter in the second rank of avowed realists—of far lesser stature, for instance, than Goya—but author of many direct and arresting portraits, and occasionally doing a figure-piece pleasing and clever. He helped Whistler to an understanding of flatness and simplification as formal assets—thus putting him on the road away from Courbet's insistent naturalism—and that was a service to later art. Like Whistler (and the post-impressionists) he caught a glimpse of a pattern-value that might profitably be restored to picturing but he was too deeply caught in the æsthetics of materialism to escape often into formally creative pastures.

The third of the triumvirate of realists of the fifties and sixties was Edgar Degas, as individual in his method as Manet, and possessor of a superior sense of design. He is best known for his charming transcriptions of ballet-dancers on the stage, in rehearsal in the dressing-room. He goes back a little to the older schools in his care for exact draughtsmanship. It does not escape him however, that his contemporaries are pushing forward toward purer colour; his becomes brilliant, lustrous, and fresh. But he does not go on to impressionism in the full, melting sense. He is too sound a constructor for that. And occasionally, out of architectural instinct and clear-seeing, with some sentiment thrown in, he achieves a picture lastingly alive and winning.

Degas studied with the classicists and went to Italy, and thus had a background uncongenial to the innovations of Courbet and Manet, whose gods were instead the Dutchmen and the Spaniards. Perhaps thus Degas was able to temper the new hasty naturalism with something organic to ordered painting with structure and form. When he chose to be "straight realist" he pushed photographic accuracy to a new level (though in soft focus), as the

Degas *The Print Collector*

[Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

*Portrait of a Woman* in the Luxembourg Museum, or the *Young Woman* in the Metropolitan Museum, indicates. But his greater achievement is in the series of studies of dancers, often as glimpsed from unusual angles, and sometimes in pastels, the race-track views, in which he used a flattened composition, with plastic understanding far superior to Manet's, and various street and cafe scenes so clearly planned on architectural principles that they almost warrant Whistler's term, "arrangements."

Degas, born in 1834, two years after Manet, lived on until 1917, through the decades of the rise and decline of the avowed naturalists, through the

entire impressionist adventure, and on to the years when the anti-realists, in the name of Cézanne and Gauguin and Van Gogh, had come into favour. In the view of the modernists he is the most respectable and rewarding of the sometime celebrated Frenchmen of the realistic century.

There are other names out of the period, once in all lists of the masters, which today are used only as indices of changes in taste, or, more usually, as warnings against what is not to be enjoyed. Meissonier, in the direct line from Greuze, born about 1814 and living on into the last decade of the century, was famous for his meticulous, almost microscopic treatment of historical episode and genre. No one else was ever so exact in rendering every hair and every button, or so conscientious in gaining archaeological and anatomical accuracy. He was an illustrator in the large with a miniaturist's technique.

Bouguereau was another who became inordinately popular, only to be accepted later as a useful bugaboo and scapegoat. He erred on the saccharine side. Realistic landscape was picked up by Cazin, and sentimentalized *ad nauseam*. He demands mention only because his canvases still cover walls and walls in British and American galleries. He was, in short, a Victorian favourite, and yet not quite bad enough to have been eased out of the museums with the British and American Victorians.

In England there were no masters comparable to Manet and Degas. A literal reproduction of the Derby Day crowds, done with miniature fidelity, proves sensational. But the more usual thing is exemplified in Landseer's animals and his touching pouting children, or in illustrations of Shakespearian scene or Greek legend.

London, nevertheless, saw a strange intellectual revolt against current standards, on the part of a group of painters who called themselves the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. They declared war on what they termed "slosh in art," of which England in 1850 had plenty, although these rebels were inclined to include Rubens and Rembrandt among the destroyers of art. Their substitute was to have been painting as nobly free in execution as that of the time before the academic classicism of Raphael, as nobly spiritual in theme as that of the era before Correggio and the sensual Venetians. They would observe from nature, not follow conventions. They would paint pictures with substance.

Their intentions were above reproach. But it happened there was not a born painter in the group. They were admirable minor poets and pamphleteers,



*Stevens Mrs Collmann [Courtesy National Gallery, London]*

and so far as visual art goes, three or four were competent illustrators. The result was that Pre-Raphaelitism slipped into forms of expression no less literary and hardly less sentimental than those of their enemies, the Academicians. In place of Frith's coloured photographs and Landseer's portraits of Rover and the monarch of the glen, they substituted English Madonnas and Italianesque Arthurian knights—all from the books—in meadows and castles rendered in a tight naturalistic technique.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was the foremost poet of the group, William Holman Hunt its most consistent early-Christian moralist, and John Everett



Constable *Stoke-by-Nayland* [Courtesy Art Institute, Chicago]

Millais its one wholly successful painter-member—who, however, backslid badly and ultimately became President of the Royal Academy. Ford Madox Brown and Edward Burne-Jones were talented followers who became prime illustrators.

It is unimportant which painters in England detoured more or less into the etherealized pastures opened by the Pre-Raphaelites, and swung out again to purvey, a little less sloshily, to the popular demand for anecdote-pictures and calendar chromos or which others continued full in the road worn smooth by Wilkie and Frith. It barely matters that two belated classicists cold and correct, turned up in Lawrence Alma Tadema and Frederick Leighton—except that Queen Victoria made the latter a Lord in recognition of his art marking the first time a brush-wielder had risen to the peerage.

In a single painting Alfred Stevens outdid all the other Brush realists. His portrait of Mrs. Collmann in the National Gallery is a thing to give pause



The subject, so beautifully the gracious Englishwoman, is set out simply and cleverly, with a sufficient reserve of detail to prevent the too usual dispersion of picture-values

The United States had a realist of the Courbet stamp, Thomas Eakins, who came too late to make history as a pivotal insurgent (for American painting had already split into a half-dozen schools—Barbizonian, impressionistic, romantic-realistic, a return-to-the-Old-Masters group inspired in Munich, etc., by the time he set up in Philadelphia after his years of study in Paris)

But it has been recognized recently that he saw with the true naturalist's curiosity and unemotional detachment, and painted with uncanny directness. It was Walt Whitman, curiously enough, who summed up the whole case for the realist in art, in a comment about Eakins: "I never knew of but one artist and that's Tom Eakins who could resist the temptation to see what they think they ought to see rather than what is."

Eakins too commonly has only the virtues of candid observation and unforced statement—leaving a great body of gallery-size illustrations—but he touches over into expert surface organization frequently enough to warrant ranking above many a figure more celebrated a generation ago. The artist most praised as bringing a typically American note into painting is Winslow Homer, a vigorous descriptive picturer of rocky coasts, stormy seas, and the lives of fisherfolk. His best work is in his water-colours, which have an admirable largeness and spontaneity.

The impressionists could hardly have existed had there been no Courbet to strike out (verbally) for an absolute surface realism. Misty, atmospheric, and vague as are the typical impressionist pictures, they came about in a search for a more exact, scientific, and immediate way of recording "natural" truth. Impressionism is the ultimate phase of realism, the final fling of those dedicated to reproducing what nature discloses to the outward eye.

But if the Frenchmen of the 1870's built theoretically on the naturalism of Courbet and Manet, they had before them suggestive works from very different quarters in which effects foreshadowing a new theory of seeing could have been detected. There were, in particular, the canvases of Constable and Turner, the two British masters who were having not one whit of influence in their own land.

Constable had gone into the open air and had achieved a sparkling effect of light. Turner had ultimately suppressed natural forms until his pictures

seemed like improvisations in pure colour—very unrestrained and nebulous, but stimulating as experiments in chromatic harmonization. Such a canvas as Constable's *Stoke-by-Nayland* at Chicago, or any of a hundred of Turner's opalescent water-colours, might have been used to demonstrate a coming vibrancy and freshness of colour—and, one might add, naturalness of colouring—unknown to the elder masters, and hardly hinted at in Courbet. The beginnings of it might be found much farther back, in certain canvases of Velazquez, and a remarkable foreshadowing of true impressionistic quivering colour and atmospheric liveliness had been seen in rare canvases of Goya.

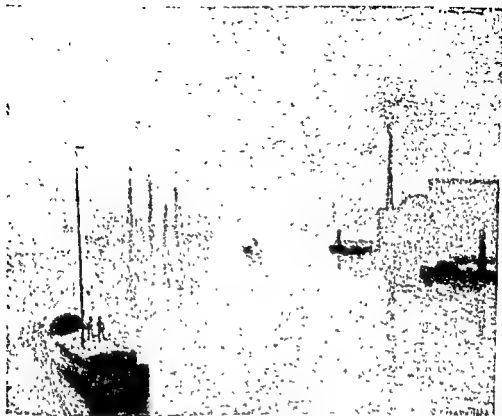
When Claude Monet began to paint, as a disciple of the Courbet group and a friendly contemporary of Manet, he received the influence from the Spaniards through Manet, and more than once he confessed a debt to the Englishmen. He became convinced that, since painting is a visual art, and all things are discovered to the eye by light falling on objects, a true realism must be attainable through a study of light as such rather than by isolating and studying the object. At the moment, new scientific analyses of colour aided his theoretical advance: colours were known to be, or to result from, light rays of varying wave-lengths. The whole problem of painting was bound up in further conquest of light.

And so one more variety of realism was added to the list: this time at the very opposite pole from Davidian classicism. What happened now was an almost total dissolution of solids, and a transfer of the painter's attention to the surface play of light over nature, and to the hidden colour-effects within light and shadow.

Camille Pissarro was as much an initiator of the new methods as Monet, and a sounder painter structurally. But just because Monet carried the principle to extremes, he is the more instructive figure, and something may be said for dropping (momentarily) all notions that painting is anything else than light nuances and colour harmonies—thus meeting impressionism on its own ground. Then Monet is supreme.

The name adopted by the school came by chance, from a reference—slurring and derogatory at the time—to one of Monet's canvases in the *Salon des Refusés* of 1874, entitled *Impression: Soleil Levant*. Reviewers found the label handy, and soon the painters undertook to defend themselves as *impressionistes*.

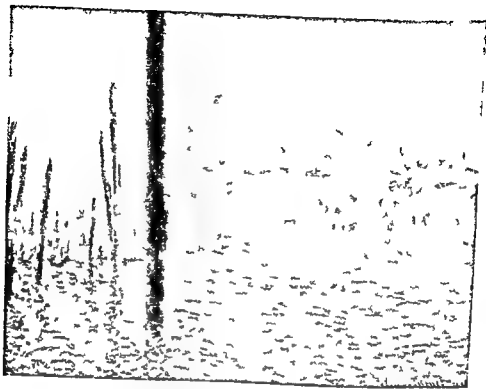
One of Monet's principles was that what the subject intrinsically is, really does not matter, only its appearance under light. This was not out of line



Pissarro: *River, Early Morning* [Courtesy John G. Johnson Art Collection, Philadelphia]

with Courbet's avowals: anything was material for art—not solely nobly ancient legends, large historical events, and religiously hallowed figures. The haystack, the postman, and the railway station now became picture subjects. Impressionism thus continued the tradition of familiar, even commonplace, subject-matter. The fact did not much matter, for technique was soon to swallow up subject or content. In the end it is not the object or event that counts, but the visual impression as caught at a certain time of day, under a certain light. Reality went into a luminous fog.

It is evident from the most cursory look into a museum that from 1870 on there are a freshness and brilliancy of colour on the gallery walls that contrast strikingly with the brown-grey look of earlier exhibits. Partly the sparkling effect is due to the suppression of drawing as the basis for painting and



Monet *Grand Canal, Venice* [Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

to the building of shadows with mixed colours, without blackening. But more especially the impressionist technique promoted freshness and vibrancy of colour by juxtaposing staccato touches of pure pigment on the canvas in the knowledge that the observer's eye at a certain distance would find the hues fused.

Roughly speaking, the orthodox method of painting a purple area theretofore had been to mix red and blue on the palette, to the desired purple shade, then to spread the mixture flat. The impressionists discovered (from laboratory scientists) that the colour came much more alive and brilliant if tiny dots or smears or lines of the two colours were placed side by side and the mixing left to the eye.

This is the technique which gave rise to the names *pointillisme*, *divisionism* and *broken colour*. The system is no longer doctrinally followed but in

modified form it contributes to the transparent liveliness of most contemporary painting

In the hands of the impressionists it all led to a feast of colour and an out-of-door freshness. And if the extreme practitioners threw away subject-matter as anything but an excuse for light-harmonies, and threw away pictorial architecture as well, Monet—and measurably Pissarro and Sisley—provided a slight colour-lyricism that sets up a sweet and acceptable song. Their snapshots of evanescent aspects, their rainbow melodies, their feminine soft-focus loveliness, are closer to our hearts than Courbet's stark journalistic reporting or Delacroix's heated melodramas.

One other gain in understanding of vision came from the impressionists' studies: the painter learned that the observer's eye does not take in outline and detail except at one area at the centre of vision. Blurring is natural, outside a very restricted area. Whether the painter should paint for a still eye or a roving eye is another question, not yet settled by the modernists, and giving rise to theories of movement *pithis* in the canvas, plastic orchestration, and rhythmic vitality which belong to expressionism. But certainly within realism there is real justification for the blurred as against the over-sharp technique.

The impressionists so far departed from care for the objective values that they would make a dozen pictures of a haystack, a bridge, or a cathedral front, if only the light were different. If the atmosphere had changed, a totally different picture would result. It was the changing nuances of luminous aspect, the shifting chromatic patterns, that counted.

Ridicule and vilification were, of course, poured upon the early pictures of Monet and Pissarro, when they began to paint atmospherically, and the painters suffered through times of direst poverty. Curiously enough the Academicians and critics included colour among the properties the new painters failed to understand. It was recorded in the *Chronique des Arts*, after the group had taken a gallery for its own exhibitions—to which eighteen avowed impressionists contributed, including Renoir, Berthe Morisot, and Cézanne: "They are lamentable. They display the profoundest ignorance of drawing, and composition, and colour. Children do better, playing with colour-box and paper."

But the little band of pioneers persisted, held exhibitions season after season, and by 1890, a quarter-century after their first challenge, began to sell pictures to a few connoisseurs, and impressionism was in line to become



Renoir *Dejeuner des Canotiers* [Courtesy Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington, D C]

academic art. It is hardly exaggeration to say that after 1900 Monet was accepted everywhere as an old master. He died in 1926 at the age of eighty-six, widely respected but already considered a little old-fashioned.

It was Renoir who turned out to be the most important—nay, the most luscious—painter of the impressionist group. He was from the start more independent, less tied to demonstrating doctrinally the formulas of *plein-air* vision and broken colour. He held, more than did Monet, to the object in its own right, and somewhat to old-time composition.

There was a feminine aspect to all the impressionist melting harmonies, and the soft beauty of it came apt to Renoir's hand. He frankly was obsessed by the sensuous and fruity loveliness of the feminine body, and concurrently, with the fragile colourfulness of flower-petals. He had once been a painter of porcelain, had afterwards while decorating fans, had visions of modernizing the voluptuous picturing of Boucher, and finally fell in with the *plein-*



Renoir: *Trois Baigneuses au Crabe*. Collection Ralph M. Coe, Cleveland  
[Photo, courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

*airistes*. He could do a surpassingly good landscape in broken colour too; and for a time he painted portraits with competently characterized figures and faces embedded in the new lush colouring. But the feminine nude and the roses more and more absorbed his interest and his genius.

There are a very great many paintings by Renoir which yield little more than a sensuous loveliness. The agreeable impression is exceptionally full, softly seductive—sometimes sickeningly sweet. But Renoir's best canvases have also a structural backbone and a formal rhythm. They then touch into achievement above any known to Pissarro and Monet and Sisley. In certain of the nude studies the solid body forms and the vague backgrounds are bound together in a sort of warming colour-glow, a glamorous sinuous

## CHAPTER XXVII

### *The Orient Again, Asia, Africa, America, the South Seas*

WHILE the march of realism was continuing in Europe, in the centuries following the innovations of Niccola Pisano and Donatello in sculpture, and of Masaccio and the van Eycks in painting, when Western art was preoccupied with the search for the scientifically true and the literally exact, there were developments of an opposite nature in Asia, Africa, and the South Seas. Nor were these unrelated to the subsequent turn of events in Europe.

At the very time when Ghiberti was putting perspective scenes upon his bronze doors for the Baptistery at Florence, when Jan van Eyck was painting his minutely truthful and painstaking portraits, the Chinese were at the beginning of a very different sort of renaissance in painting, were already practising the highly stylized art of the Ming period. Japan was then emerging from dependence upon China, to produce a distinctive body of painting and sculpture within the formal Eastern manner. Persia re-enters the story with a type of miniature picturing distinguished by a very special fragile loveliness.

All these achievements demand chronicling at some point between the chapters on the Italian Renaissance and that dealing with the revolt against realism in Europe in the late nineteenth century. The works from China, Japan, and Persia affected profoundly the post-impressionists who in the late nineteenth century broke the hold of naturalism upon European artists. There may be added here, too, for lack of any more logical point of articulation with the structure of world history—as erected by European scholarship—mention of certain manifestations from more alien peoples, in Central Africa, in the South Seas, and in pre-Columbian America. These too have, since their discovery, influenced a little the direction of artistic effort in Europe, and museums have been known to move out whole roomfuls of painting and



sculpture of the illustrational era to make way for Mayan sculptures, Negro fetishes, and Polynesian carvings

China after the fall of the Yuan dynasty, in 1368, was never again to see such glorious achievements in sculpture as had been hers at intervals through the preceding two thousand years. There was to be, indeed, hardly more than imitation within the older types, and some vigorous but not particularly inventive carving in the service of architecture. Painting, however, knew a renaissance in the Ming era that followed the Yuan. Architecture then came to its most characteristic expression. And pottery was further refined, into that delicate white ware which is known as "china" in all parts of the civilized world.

The first of the line of Ming emperors undertook to re-establish art upon a lavish scale. In painting it was re-establishment and rebirth rather than a new creative release along original lines. In an effort to equal the transcending achievements of the Sung era, the rules were tightened, and mastery of traditional methods and subjects was rewarded. Very beautiful work was done within limits set by devotion to one old master or another, Wu Tao-tzū or Wang Wei or Ma Yuan. The eclectic and intellectual tendencies finally prevailed, and the Ming effort passed ultimately into sterile and decadent repetitions of old themes and old formulas.

Among other results of devotion to the past was the preservation of the works of painters of the T'ang and Sung periods in copies by artists only a shade less gifted than the ancient masters. Of original works there is a large body concerned with the depiction of trees, flowers, and birds, in which the subject becomes less important than the technique and "manner." There are schools leaning to monochrome painting and others turning to fuller colour. Calligraphic line is brought again to a marvellous degree of expressiveness—of vigour and virility on the one hand, of sensitive shading and delicate incisiveness on the other. Rules are laid down for handling of the brush and the character of the stroke for willow foliage or pine twigs or eagle's claws.

This effort was to lead on in late times to that sort of painting, so puzzling to the Western mind, which concerns itself with a show of virtuosity in rendering one of four traditional subjects—bamboo, chrysanthemums, orchids, and plum blossoms. These are, of course, treasured plants, and a certain appropriateness exists of treatment to flower, but to the connoisseur the richer pleasure is afforded by the quality of the brush-stroke, the felicity of the placing, and the spontaneity or 'life' of the impression.



Chou Yüan: Deer. Ming dynasty [Courtesy Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.]

In general, painting of the Ming period is closer to Western ideals than that of earlier eras, for there is less of the mystical element, less attempt to express in æsthetic terms the unknowable and the fleeting. Taoism is less a motivating force. But art remains, even so, essentially conventional in method, and unconcerned with surface truths. There are works that follow the traditional calligraphic style and accomplish miracles of abstract order. There are others—they are the more likely to have found their way into Western collections—which are less summary, less heedless in their treatment of nature's appearances, which have less of austerity and magnitude and more of intimate grace and human sentiment.

When the end of the Ming dynasty came in 1644, painting was already a matter of exercises in this recognized manner or that. But when the new Manchu dynasty was established, another art received encouragement and went on to unprecedented accomplishments. In pottery and porcelain the beautiful wares known to the T'ang and Sung periods were duplicated, even as late as the mid-seventeenth century, and distinctive decorated porcelains were originated.

The ceramic art had been practised in China with notable mastery as far back as the Han era. But it was during the time of the T'ang splendour that a great variety of products appeared, in every field from small sculpture in glazed and unglazed terra-cotta to most delicate, unornamented vase and bowl, extremely sensitive in proportioning and in porcelain-like finish. In the Sung era (corresponding to the European Middle Ages) the potters went on to a bewildering number of wares of surpassing excellence, and this is known as China's classic period in ceramics. To the uneducated eye the museum cases seem to contain merely a beautifully varied display of attractive pieces: fragilely lovely pale plates and slender vases, solidly realized and sturdily ornamented jars and bowls, and at the end a range of gorgeously decorated vessels in a great variety of techniques and finishes, with lavish all-over patterning or elaborate formalized picturing.

The specialists in ceramic history and appreciation have developed an intricate and useful system of classification, but the layman may find enjoyment without more than a casual knowledge of techniques, potteries, and styles, though he will remember as typically Chinese certain early heavy wares, later translucent ones of an extreme fineness of texture and patterning, and, in latest periods, the sumptuously decorated monumental vases, as richly adorned as the Chinese embroidered robes or the lacquer screens or the



Glazed dish Persian 17th century [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

cloisonné vessels. A few distinctive types will have stayed in mind by name: the jade-like celadon, the peach bloom, the hawthorn, the ox-blood, certain of the wares with crackle glaze, and of course the "standard" fine white porcelain, particularly the blue and white. It was in the Ming period that 'white china' emerged as the outstanding contribution of the Chinese to ceramic art, and the town of Ching-tê Chên near Nanking then became world-famous for the products of its potteries. Imperial encouragement of the art was renewed in the Ch'ing period, and inventive design continued into the nineteenth century, with more showy results if with less reserve.

If Chinese bowls and vases have become familiar to Western eyes, and so have come to be treasured for their patent excellencies, Chinese architecture is in quite another case. Almost unchanging in general aspect through all its known history and through all types of monumental building, utterly different from European forms, it seems as a style alien and difficult. Nevertheless, a brief study of its effect in relation to materials, use, and the thinking of the Chinese people must lead to recognition of a sufficient logic in it, combined with richness and consistency of decorative expression. It is essentially a decorated architecture, rather than one nakedly expressive of function.

The roof is in general the dominating feature. It is supported by stilts, and the whole is held together by an elaborate system of bracketing and tying. The walls are screens between the stilts rather than weight-bearing members (as is true in Gothic cathedrals and modern steel-framed skyscrapers, but without parallel in other Western building). The exterior decorativeness is achieved largely through the elaborated treatment of the roof and its under-eaves supports. The roof edges are commonly given a flare at the corners. In the eight-sided pagodas, or temple towers, the roof overhang is repeated at each story, and a "repeat roof" over a gallery is one of the commonest motives in the design of larger structures.

There are no large buildings comparable to European cathedral or Indian temple. The Chinese—unless one count the common wall or continuous fortification—have very few single grand structures. Rather they add together, for palace or religious shrine, a series of lesser buildings, placed on courts and bound by encircling and connecting walls. What would be a palace elsewhere becomes, in Peking, the complex of buildings and courts and walls, almost labyrinthine in character, known as the Forbidden City.

If the European or American observer misses the accent of simple grandeur that is heralded by the finest of monumental Western buildings—say the Greek temples, the Pantheon and the Roman basilicas, and the early Gothic cathedrals—one yet may enjoy the Chinese temples, pavilions, and pagodas as an isolated type of decorative architecture, well suited to the nature of the country, narrowly and even monotonously idiomatic, but distinctive and—in its place—eye-filling, satisfying. In certain of the crafts accessory to architecture, especially in wood-carving, the Chinese have excelled all others as consistent and lavish decorators, excepting only the Japanese.

In Japan the development of art is marked by a series of definable periods

in which alternately the artists follow closely the ideals and influences brought in from China, and then settle down to assimilate, and give a slight native flavour to, the imported ways of expression Japanese art has a history of its own, but for many centuries the finest manifestations were so clearly a reflection of Chinese practice that they are best explained as parts or extensions of the older culture.

The art works that survive from the period before the introduction of Buddhism into the country are negligible. The new religion was brought from China by way of Korea about A.D. 400, but only in the mid-sixth century did it find wide acceptance. A second mighty wave of influence came during the expansion of Chinese culture in the T'ang era, and again the art impulse was linked with Buddhist thought and practice. It was then that Japanese art flowered most beautifully in direct imitation of the Chinese masters in what is known as the Nara period, from the name of the capital city. When a third wave came, during the Chinese Sung dynasty, it was again Buddhism that influenced expression in sculpture, painting, and architecture. The sect known as Zen Buddhists brought in—often at the hands of priest-artists—an "idealized" type of painting, which reached its fullest development, however, only in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

There is, in the early periods, no point at which one can pick up the thread of Japanese art and say "Here began the exquisite craftsmanship and vivid impressionism which are characteristic of the national genius." Rather the distinctive qualities had been developed gradually. At any rate, by the time that marks the opening of the Renaissance period in Europe, there is, in Japan, ample evidence of a passion for delicate craftsmanship, for preciseness and grace of statement, for decorative effect by sharp contrast—all within the limits of strict formalization in the general Eastern manner.

These special qualities persist through courtly art and popular, through religious and profane. Whether in a painting of the Kamakura period, which corresponds to the late Sung, or in a brush drawing by the people's artist Hokusai, who lived six centuries later, there is the touch that the Western world has come to know as Japanese.

In Japanese painting there are the conventions known to practically all Oriental picture-art: flatness of composition with little modelling of figures, with depth suggested rather than emphasized—though "space" is made a living part of the design to an extent unknown in the Western world, disregard of shadows, concentration of attention upon single figures or land-

scape bits, with suppression of environmental and incidental detail. All this leads to an art of suggestion rather than of factual statement. But the Japanese passion for precise rightness and for decorative sharpness leads to amazing feats in delineation of those details that the artist deems important to his purpose. There is this duality of strict formalization and devotion to miniature truth, in countless works.

The neglect of shadowing, of perspective, of background, is well shown in portions of the roll painting known as *The Burning of the Sanjo Palace*, one of the masterpieces of Kamakura art, of the thirteenth century. Here are extraordinary vividness and precision and concentration. Each bit when detached by the eye, particularly the leading bowman or the horse and rider, is characterized by spirited action, by exquisitely sensitive drawing, and by superb decorative stylization.

Landscape the better suggests one of the sources of the Japanese method of laying up the pictorial elements in planes, with a vivid contrast of a few striking elements—trees, rocks, silhouettes of roofs or hills—against misty receding elements. The backgrounds are hardly more than curtains inserted to make the vigorous "forward" bits stand out more vividly. The Japanese countryside is like that. The hazy air softens all that is in distance and gives sharp definition to near by tree branches and buildings, or it may be birds and horses. Thus the artist is bred in an environment that suggests simplification of composition, and contrast of foreground and muted distance.

It would be wrong to argue the point too far, for there are, in those types of painting more directly taken from the Chinese, compositions richly complex and filled with fascinating bits throughout the background. This is especially true of certain phases of painting in illustration of Buddhist legendry, where panels are filled with correlated episodes and interwoven groups of figures, like tapestries incredibly lavish in story materials, yet amazingly detailed and sensitive. At the other extreme is that sort of painting that gives pleasure especially by the calligraphic expressiveness of the drawing and the exact spacing of the motive on the picture plane. A single tiger or horse or dragon will dominate its panel to the farthest empty corner. Or a sprig of flower or a branch with a bird, sometimes a human figure or a head, will serve as well to bring the field of space to life. Here the Japanese brush-drawn line, like the Chinese, becomes subtly and richly eloquent beyond any consummation known to the art of the West.

Out of this sort of painting there came two developments which largely



Roll-painting, *The Burning of the Sanjo Palace* Detail Japanese, Kamakura period, 13th century [Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston]

stand for Japanese art to the casual observer the folding screens with decorative paintings, and the coloured woodcut prints. The screens, used as movable walls where Western homes have built-in partitions, demand a special decorative style, leaning even more to the conventional and the abstract than the independent or hanging paintings, and it was necessary that the composition be pleasing as a whole even while the part appearing upon each panel or leaf should have sufficient unity and coherence.

The earlier screens, of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, were paintings in Chinese ink on paper, and the delicacy of tonal transitions, and the vigour of the calligraphic drawing, counted greatly. In the sixteenth century there came a richer style, nearer to frank ornamentation, and the introduction of fuller colours, varied with areas of gold and silver. Sesshu, Eitoku, and Sosatsu are names particularly known in connexion with the screens, and in the sumptuous decorative mode Korin was one of the outstanding masters. He is sometimes called Japan's greatest decorative painter. The screen painted by Korin, now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, with waves vigorously formalized, characterized by powerful movement held securely within the picture field, is typical.

The coloured prints represent the plebeian picture-art of Japan. Despite their marvellous compositional values, their felicitous drawing, and some-



times exquisite colouring, they are considered by Japanese connoisseurs an inferior type of art. The technique, determined not by the use of the brush but by the capabilities of the graver's knife (the prints being impressed from woodblocks or planks), is comparatively "hard" and the effect posteresque. Nevertheless, there are carried over into the new medium the exquisite craftsmanship and the feeling for rich pattern, and the sensitive drawing is not so much lost as reborn in a different sort of excellence.

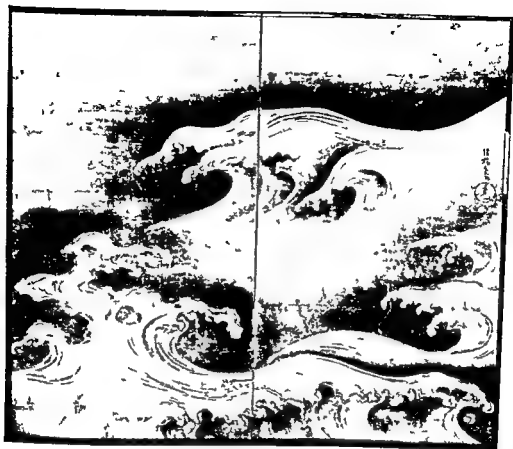
This people's art, which grew out of *Uki-yo-e*, a type of genre painting "picturing the passing world," separate from the Buddhist art and from the types of roll and screen painting which the nobles affected in imitation of the Chinese, became popular in the middle of the seventeenth century, and production of masterly works continued until the middle of the nineteenth century. They are masterly, of course, only in a minor field, and are not to be compared with Oriental paintings in the matter of sensuous fullness and plastic orchestration. But there are a gracious intimacy and a charming harmony about them, and fortunately it is an art within the reach of the lightest purse.

After Moronobu (1625-1694), who is credited with popularizing the prints—though not with inventing them, for this art too had Chinese antecedents—there came a series of artists who specialized in figure pictures. For a full hundred years the prints were made from a single block and hand-coloured. Then two blocks were used, and finally, about 1765, a great designer, Harunobu, introduced polychrome blocks.

After him there are the great names of Kiyonaga and Utamaro, and finally Hokusai and Hiroshige, who are the more familiar to European and American collectors because they specialized in subjects to which the Western amateur is accustomed, especially landscape. Both were exceptional masters of drawing and composition on the flat.

Hokusai is internationally known for paintings and brush drawings as well as prints. No one has been able to express more of vigorous movement and of characteristic feature and gesture in a single stroke. In the *Manga*, an encyclopaedic series of picture books, there are miracles of expressive statement, and endless inspiration for the lover of "free" drawing. But most famous of his works are the prints known as *The Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*.

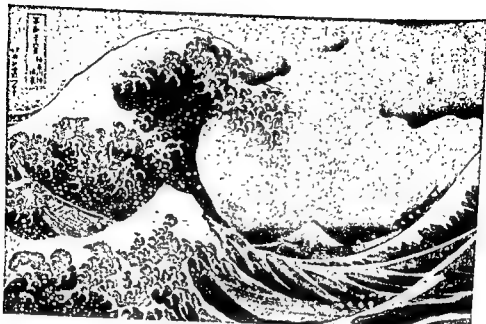
At the end of his life Hokusai called himself the old man mad with draw-



Kōrin *The Wave* Screen [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

ing," and he died saying that if the Powers had only granted him another five years, he might have become a real master. Perhaps because he is a little more given to "human interest" and a little more realistic in his drawing than most Japanese artists, his fame has gone round the world, and he is, outside Japan, considered the country's foremost draughtsman of all time. The Japanese connoisseur, seeking certain traditional virtues of scholarly allusion and handling, and doubtless a little put off by Hokusai's vulgar choice of subjects, counts him inferior to many another master. Nevertheless, it may be a long time before Japan or any other nation produces an artist at once so direct and vigorous in statement and yet with such subtle expressiveness in line.

Japanese sculpture is hardly so distinctive as the painting and the prints



Hokusai: *The Wave*. Wood engraving, from series *The Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* [Courtesy Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University]

The interest in fineness led in general to over-interest in detail, and to the loss of the larger plastic rhythm. There have been critics who held up the Japanese works as peers of the Chinese; but only when realism is the beginning point of criticism can the body of national sculpture stand as other than a reflection of that of the older country. There are very fine things, particularly in wood sculpture, but in the sum the achievement is less notable than that of India and China, of Java and Cambodia.

In the ceramic art, on the other hand, the Japanese have long been world masters. Their work has not the extraordinarily wide range of the Chinese or the Persian; but there is a distinctive loveliness in many of their bowls, and a very high standard of design in their simplest wares. In the decoration of pottery and porcelain their artists show the same surprising combination of vigour and delicacy, of strong outline and subtle tonal variation, which is seen in the painting. Architecture in the island empire is similar to that of China; is, indeed, directly derivative, with differences in detail that become apparent to the Western eye only after study. The buildings run to a greater

refinement in carved ornamentation, and to lighter and more graceful effects in the arrangement of the multiplied roofs. These seem to cut the sky with silhouettes exactly fitted to those of the pine trees of the surrounding garden—which is, of course, also a work of painstaking art.

In Persia, where so many of the Oriental arts and crafts had flowered in earlier centuries, there was, after the Mogul invasions, a renaissance, and there are works in incised bronze and in precious-metal inlays, in pottery and in porcelain, in woven damask silk and in figured velvets, which are not unworthy of a place beside the older masterpieces. But it is in two other arts not unknown before but less conspicuously practised, that new history is made in the centuries between 1300 and 1700. In painting, a fragilely lovely exquisitely decorative sort of miniature is perfected. In rug weaving there is achieved a beauty hardly approached elsewhere in all the world.

The Persian miniature is one of those minor arts that have drawn devoted bands of followers, who prize the special delicacy, naive charm, and sensuous colourfulness beyond the more monumental virtues of painting as practised farther East and farther West. In the field of picturing that is designed as illustration, that is filled with story materials, this is the sort that is most expert and most ingratiating *as decoration*.

The body of Persian painting lies almost wholly within the covers of books. They are exceptionally sumptuous books, but literature is the reason for the miniatures. The manuscript without the pictures would be a work of art, for here calligraphy is a branch of design. The painting often loses when taken from its inscribed borders and "context." Yet some thousands of the miniatures have been removed from the manuscripts and placed independently on gallery walls, and there delight countless eyes.

The special charm of the Persian painting lies in its incisive delicacy of line, its rich yet pale harmony of colours, and its strict formalization of composition. There is an atmosphere of enchantment here—a breath of a world all gardens and forests, all music and play, all romance and poetry. The method is that of the Far East—China had exerted direct influence upon Persia long before the Moguls brought the countries under one rule—with the picture elements laid up in flattened planes, with background suppressed or converted frankly into an area of patterning. There is no roundness in the figures and there is no attempt at shadowing. In colour the Persian paintings are consistently brighter and fresher than the Chinese. This is explained,



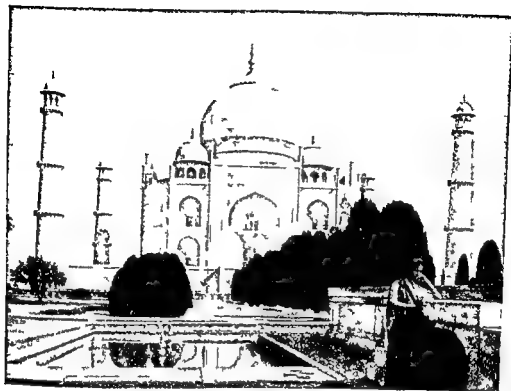
Miniature from manuscript of the *Shah-Namah* Persian 14th century  
 [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

perhaps, by the fact that the Persian instinct for decorative design had been expressed for a period in Mohammedan arabesque practice, and then had been influenced by the art brought by the Mogul conquerors from China. The three elements blend in this enchanting art that is both literary and ornamental, which pictures people yet has something of the curtain quality of the arabesque.

There are few known names of artists from the earlier centuries. Then in the late fifteenth century the greatest master, Bihzād, is encountered. He had notable followers but none of his own stature. By the opening of the seventeenth century the art was well along on its gradual decline.

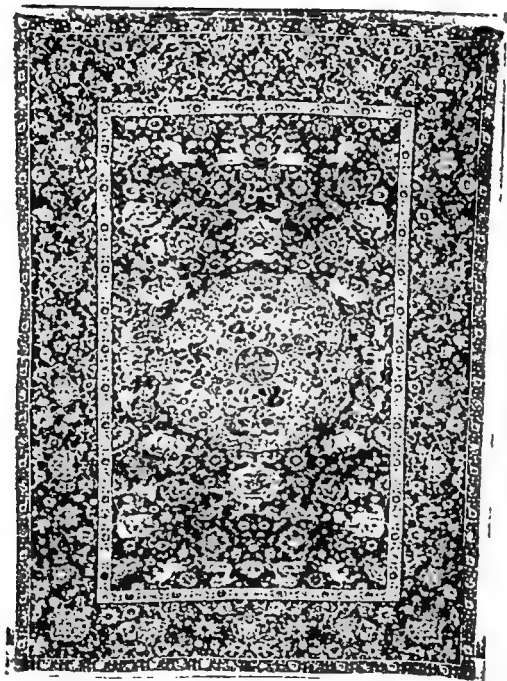
Even reproductions in black and white, without the seductive colouring may reveal the marvellous subtlety of line and tone, the crisp composition, and the vivid textural contrasts in the examples of this precious art. Whether it is an apparently inconsequential tail-piece like the bit from a manuscript of the *Shah-Namah*, of the fourteenth century, in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, or a gorgeous elaborated piece like the famous *Humay Received at the Court of China*, of the fifteenth century, in the Louvre, the picture bears the marks of supreme mastery in one miniature field of decorative art.

Something of the same grace, the same sensuous colouring, the same fastidiousness in design, is carried into the rugs and carpets with which Persian



The Taj Mahal Agra India 17th century [Ph to courtesy Indian State Railways]

artist-craftsmen have delighted the world in later centuries. While the other arts are declining, weaving knows a renaissance. As the Iranian silks had taken rank as the most ravishing works within the textile art back in Sassanian times, so now, a millennium later, the Persian rug became the type exhibit of art that is luxurious, enchantingly colourful, exquisite, and formalized. It may be an abstract design in the direct tradition of the architectural or ceramic arabesque or an "animal rug" with conventionalized beasts strewn in a flowered field, or a "garden map", but the virtues of a mural flatness, a rich depth of tone, and a marvellously opulent patterning will adhere in each case. These are indeed a final achievement in the textile art. All the countries bordering on Persia, and those which experienced the contact when Persian craftsmen went abroad in the service of Islam, felt the influence which led to this achievement, and Turkish rugs and Indian are only a little less esteemed than those from Iran.



Medallion rug, Peruvian, 17th century [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

Twenty years later the Negro figures have taken a sure place in the annals and the galleries of creative art, but it is seen to be a not very large place. There is recognition of a limited expression extraordinarily vivid and sensitive, accomplished with unmistakable marks of expert craftsmanship. And a large public has been found to take delight, upon occasion, in the direct imaging, the rhythmic vitality, and the painstaking finish. The appreciative white can never, of course, reach enjoyment of the sort, tinged with religious and racial emotion, which the artist meant to stir in his own people. Fortunately the rich formal and plastic values, and certain subject appeals more universal than local, exist above the symbolic or ritualistic values.

The idols, masks, and decorated utensils now shown in European and American museums have been brought from various parts of Africa and are the products of cultures widely different in degree of civilization. Of some a good deal is known. Such is the state of Benin, which was visited and reported upon in the fifteenth century, and for which a fairly complete history can be constructed. Others still await exploration and documentation. The wide diversity of ways of expression, the occurrence of metal sculpture in some provinces and not in others, and the divergencies in craftsmanship are, in any case, signs of independent cultural growth.

And yet there is a generic likeness in the body of Negro work. At almost no point does it tend to naturalism. As a group these thousands of sculptures show an exceptional intuitive grasp upon the thing that has lately been discussed as the form element in art, upon plastic organization and rhythmic order. The objects throughout have a detached, impersonal quality, a reserve. There is about them no mark of the self-conscious artist, displaying knowledge and indulging in flourish.

It is probable that very few of the works surviving were produced more than two hundred years ago and most are likely to have been made in the nineteenth century. The workmanship and apparently the feeling for plastic expression deteriorated after the Negro's contact with the white races, and recent sculpture lacks the virtues found in the pieces earlier collected.

It is probably safe to place the time of the preponderance of works commonly studied as between 1775 and 1875. Doubtless the tradition and practice had existed for many centuries before, through what crossings and recrossings of cultures we cannot know but products in wood disintegrate fairly quickly and the likelihood is against the survival of more ancient examples. What bits of history there are, some bordering perhaps on fable, indicate the ex-





Negro sculpture French Congo [Courtesy University Museum, Philadelphia]

istence in earlier eras of states closer to the European idea of civilization than any existing among the African Negroes today. The arts of Africa are not the chance achievements of barbarous peoples, nor are they a suddenly emergent phenomenon.

If one wondered at first that the bronzes of Benin should have such largeness, such sureness, and such elaboration of ornament, one may know now that this mature sculptural art went with extensive palaces, broad boulevards, and a luxurious way of living. The reliefs and statues are characterized by a perfection of finish unsurpassed on the other continents, indicating a knowl-

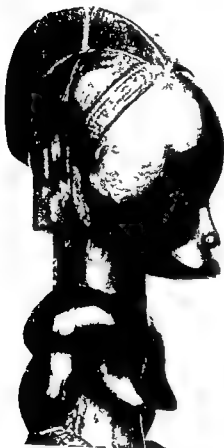
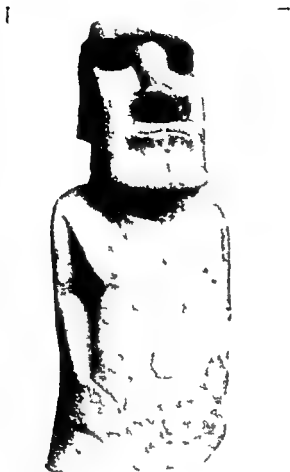


Figure known as the *African Venus*. Collected by Louis Carré  
[Photo, courtesy Museum of Modern Art]

edge of the *cire perdue* process of casting. Some critics believe that the technique was transmitted by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, others that it came to the Negroes from Egypt. A second group of "mature" sculptural works was uncovered by Frobenius at Ife in British Nigeria in 1910, and this find lends colour to the theory of a fully developed Negro art earlier than the supposed Portuguese importation of European influence.

But the Benin and Ife products are exceptional in the range of African works, and the great mass of idols and utensils, of masks and fetishes, may be said to lie much nearer to primitive imaging and primitive craftsmanship.



Idol stone Easter Island [Courtesy British Museum]

There is simple direct statement of the essentials of the subject. There is elementary repetition of a few main rhythms. There is grasp of abstract values. There is loving care for the potentialities of the medium for the polished surface of the wood. Beyond all there is that mastery of formal organization of plastic manipulation which we can explain only as intuitive. These are the works of born sculptors. In no other way can one account for the relationship of volumes in the little figure illustrated here—known as the *African*—or the lighter rhythms of line and mass in the equestrian figure shown in the opening chapter.

At one time it is the naïve direct thinking, the concentration of interest, and the intensification of feeling that count most. Again it is the felicity of some bit of incidental ornamentation, or the literally polished craftsmanship. The masks afford particularly eloquent examples of near-abstract formalization, they are not carvings in imitation of human features, but abstractions of the idea of god or adorer or devil. The structure or geometry of the face remains, the rest is invention or improvisation—an artist's feeling and imaging given concrete form.

A second field of discovery of unsophisticated art was opened when appreciators of African sculpture turned to the South Sea Islands. Polynesian and Melanesian idols and masks are found to have, though at a lesser intensity, the concentrated emotion, the direct statement, the plastic vitality of the work of the blacks. There is, here, more of elaboration of ornament for its own sake. Some of the masks—particularly those from New Guinea and the New Hebrides Islands—are gorgeously showy. The richness, with suitable reserve, enters into the wood-carving of the Maoris, where canoes, prows, oars, and house pillars are sculptured with intricate designs, wherein near-abstract patterning is varied with inserted objective figures.

Here again the artist is unself-conscious. He approaches his materials and his task with respect, getting fullest beauty out of the wood in which he works, and never forgetting the purpose of his statue or relief in a show of personal virtuosity. The carvings have consistent style, they are creations not copies of nature, they are eloquent of a loving care for the craftsmanship involved.

The Maoris, of course, were far advanced beyond primitive or barbaric conditions of life, and their works are those of a mature (though not especially intellectual) culture. The works from Oceania cover a range from this fairly civilized art to primitive examples in which the simpler geometric forms of decoration predominate, and imaging of man or totem-animal is of the most summary and formal nature. Throughout the range may be discovered the sense of rhythm, the purely sculptural or decorative vitality, which had been lost from European practice for so many generations when these "heathenish" works were first taken from the ethnographic museums and brought to the galleries by the expressionists.

Yet even in Europe there were traces of this art that had retained primitive directness and primitive plastic mastery. It was discovered, not without



Head of a god Mayan Copan Honduras probably 6th century *Peabody Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts* [Photo, courtesy *Museum of Modern Art*]

surprise on the part of the critics, that in the most advanced countries a peasant art" persisted, often with the marks of fresh clear seeing and instinctive creation upon it Peasant potteries, textiles, and wood-carvings were

gathered from the Balkan countries, Russia, Tirol, the Swiss mountain districts "Unspoiled" art was discovered even in Italy and in Germany.

From study of the peasant arts and the exotic objects from Africa and Oceania a generalization was drawn—and it is not inappropriate to the pages of a history. The long process of civilizing man, by systematic cultivation of the intellect, had resulted in a certain narrowing of the human faculties to calculated ends. Europe came to inventive, governmental, and intellectual mastery by educating for business enterprise, scientific advance, military domination, and other purposes far from creative æsthetic fields. Men in that process lost contact with nature as simple inspiration, with the well-springs of intuitive living, with the creative spirit. What some called "the disease of civilization" had to be gone through.

It was worth going through only if the material and intellectual conquest meant leisure afterward in which artists could be released back to their own activities, and the obscured threads of æsthetic creativeness be picked up again. Fortunately some "benighted" peoples had resisted the allurements of intellectual progress, had held to modes of expression near to pristine formal creativeness. Now it was found, too, that the masses of lower-class people who, within civilized countries, had been debarred from the intellectual life had retained something of the unspoiled faculty for imaging and the natural feeling for craftsmanship of the primitive. Europe, then, and America, must turn back to learn from the peasants, from the African Negroes, from the Polynesians and Melanésians.

Such was the argument by which the artists and critics who rediscovered the folk arts and the exotic arts directed general attention to a body of objects long overlooked, if not scorned. Modern art is not a result of study of the near-primitive and exotic things, but it has gained a great deal from knowledge and enjoyment of them. It was found that what art needed, for refertilization, was a retreat from intellectualism, sophistication, and academism. In going over to enjoyment of works near the primitive, in simplicity, in formal vitality, in impersonality, the artists have found a spur to pure creativeness, to intuitive imaging and dynamic expression. They are trying today to re-encompass these desirable things within a practice that holds also to the gains made in the name of Western civilization.

One other recently discovered body of art, though not to be considered primitive or even early, has been paraded by expressionists as superior to the



Terra cotta statuette Detail Mayan Peabody Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts  
[Photo, courtesy Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University]

European product of the realistic centuries. The Mayan culture is especially rich in sculpture, both monumental and miniature, and its textiles and pottery rank high in the lists of accomplishment in those two crafts. The entire field of pre-Columbian art in America, not yet fully explored, offers rich reward for the student, whether in the advanced cultures of Peru, Central America and Yucatan, or in the derivative and nearer-primitive cultures of surviving Indian tribes in Mexico and the United States. But it is from the Mayans that the works that might be agreed upon as masterpieces are taken—and these alone, perhaps, are material to be included in a world history.

Mayan sculpture in general was close to architecture, adorning great temples and palaces. The reliefs are almost as profuse as in the great Javan and Cambodian temples. There are, too, independent stone-carved furnishings, usually of a ritual nature: sacrificial tables, calendar stones, masks, etc. The mastery of formal design, however, extended through the range of household and personal objects, jugs and plates, cloths and jewellery.

As examples of the expert, not to say surpassing, character of Mayan sculpture, one may study that body of fragments owned by the Peabody Museum at Harvard University (though there are excellent collections in the natural history museums in New York and Paris and Berlin, and most notably in the National Museum in Mexico City). The two typical works illustrated here may serve to indicate the sculptural largeness combined with sensitive modelling, the powerful plastic "movement" played against reticently patterned areas. The manner of it is Oriental, unrealistic, conventional. Its affinities are with Chinese and Cambodian art rather than European.

This is to be added to the arts brought from afar to give support to those who were recently the radicals of Europe's studios, who now are making over Western art in the most far-reaching revolution since the time of Giotto. It is time to turn back to Europe, and to the history of the change from realism to expressionism.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

### *"Always Another Dawn"*

TWO thousand years ago a puzzled ruler faced by a spiritual prophet asked "What is truth?" Men today are as far as ever from agreement upon an answer. Three centuries before the time of Pilate, a Greek philosopher had ventured an opinion in answer to a question hardly less puzzling "What is art?" Aristotle had said "Art is imitation."

Whether the phrase was mistranslated (as some believe) or misinterpreted, there can be no doubt that the idea behind the saying supported by the great authority accorded Aristotle's name dominated theories of the visual arts in Europe from the late Middle Ages to the mid-nineteenth century. From the beginning of the Renaissance to the time of Courbet's naturalism there was a steady march of art as surface realism—a gradual refinement of means by which the aspects of nature could be imitated. The great revolution in both æsthetics and practice came when a few radical artists gave up the convention of imitation and reversed the centuries-long trend, moved away toward other than representational values.

Because impressionism had been the last marked phase of the historic march of realism the critics who earliest recognized the epochal nature of the revolution named the emergent art "post-impressionism." After a half-century of development it has found a more definitive label, "expressionism," a name that seems destined to live because it throws emphasis back upon expression as against imitation.

Expression of what? The moderns do not, of course, fully agree upon an answer. The one generalization that can be made, after examination of the diverse currents of creative painting since 1880, is that all are anti-realistic. The one single thing that no reputable twentieth-century artist does is imitate effects discovered in nature. Correlatively the modern does not illustrate. He

distorting figure or face, tree or flower, for weight effect or repetitive accent (though generally distorting for mural flatness), they obviously belong to the non-imitative school

These might be said to represent the three main channels of expressionist experiment and advance, although there is every shade of pure and of compromised expression, and a host of individualists emerge to challenge any generalized statement. Nonetheless, the layman will find the approach to the art of 1880-1930 simplified if he remembers the three stressed ways of expression: subjective or emotional, abstract or plastic, decorative.

All three wings hold to one other basic expressive virtue. A special value, a particular intensity of effect, is to be gained out of the use of materials and tools. Thus the sculptor especially expresses stone or wood and the cutting instruments. The painter "declares" his two-dimensional field, his colour, and his brushstrokes. It is for this reason that one has the granite aspect, the mountainous and hard "feel," of so much modernist sculpture, and the stressed painty look of paintings. It is intensified expression of medium. Van Gogh piled up gobs of raw paint and revelled in flaming colour, but equally Cézanne used paints with utmost regard for the formal value of each stroke, and the third pioneer post-impressionist, Gauguin, gorgeously and daringly enlarged the Western way of utilizing colour, for decorative ends.

Expression in art means, too, a reflection of environment, of outward life around the artist. It is hardly necessary to point out an exceptional *dynamic* quality in all the arts since impressionism. In the machine age, when living has been intensified and movement accelerated, art has taken on intensity of colour and vigour of statement, and where the plastic element is discussed one hears especially of "movement in the canvas." The scientific gains of the laboratory, opening new vistas into stupendous universes, and giving fresh meaning to men's conception of order, are not unreflected in the painting that turns its attention to abstract structure.

Art's own revolution is so thorough that it has no illusions about expressing the new age merely by illustrating outward aspects. (The futurists thought they could be modern by picturing automobiles and other moving objects, and stressing their speed lines, and because they were thus holding to the illustrative, that is the imitative, view they have dropped out of the lists of significant twentieth-century schools.) Expressionism seeks to express the *spirit* of the machine age which is, after all, folded within the spirit of each artist-seer.

One last word of theory and caution, to aid further against narrow-mindedness—in order that more of us may perhaps, in relation to today's radicals, avoid the sort of blindness that led our recent forefathers to starve and persecute successively the impressionists, the first post-impressionists then the avowed expressionists let us understand all we can of abstract art. They have a very reasonable case who argue that the next release of the creative impulse will be in the direction of revealing more fully the spirit of man in terms plastic but mystic. As we think of generic man continually increasing the scope of his understanding, at present in realms outside sense experience so we may think of the creative artist as widening his faculties for intuition and imaging and affording us—if we too have widened our capacities—further experience of a realm mystic and beautiful.

Men have pushed back the frontiers of understanding. The most sensitive seers among them, their artists, may be on the road to the expression of an order beyond common sight, to experience in a realm with a life beyond visible nature's. As music deals aurally with abstractions so painting may come to deal visually—and create a singular world of delight.

By trying to understand the farthest reaches of abstraction in art, we shall the better understand all of modernism since Cezanne, because a structure of intangibles lies within every memorable canvas of the artists who continue history after 1880.

Paul Cezanne was born in 1839 at Aix-en-Provence. His people were of lower middle-class families. His father, however, moved up from the business of selling felt hats to banking and became the leading citizen and financier of the town. Thus Paul when he had fought down his father's opposition—he studied law for two years and wasted a third during which he wrote considerable verse—was enabled by income from his family to study in Paris whither he went first in 1861 and then to live modestly but comfortably through years and years and years during which he failed to sell a picture. He threw in his artistic fortunes with the painters of the *Salon des Refuses*, from which the impressionists as a school were to emerge soon after. His early professional life was spent between Provence and Paris, and he learned directly from Manet and Pissarro, before his own further revolutionary ideas made him a lone rebel.

He kept hope for a time that his paintings might gain recognition and reward, even officially, but later became so absorbed in the actual problems of



Cézanne: *Landscape* [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

picture-making that he left off thinking of juries and museums and buyers, even throwing a canvas into a handy ditch, or cutting it to ribbons, once the work was done. He deserted Paris periodically for his more congenial Provence and was known to be practically a recluse.

When he was fifty-six years old, in 1895, after a period of eighteen years during which only three of his pictures had been shown in exhibitions, a dealer penetrated his obscurity and arranged a one-man show in Paris. The response was divided, ranging from the summary in the *Journal des Artistes*, "a nightmarish apparition of atrocities," to enthusiastic reviews. The dealer went to Aix and bought a large number of Cézanne's pictures and later made a fortune from them. Cézanne died in 1906. Within the following quarter-century even the most respectable museums put in his works.

Cézanne is first among modern artists by reason of both spiritual leadership

and accomplishment in his own art. No one could seem less like a world leader than this strange, provincially ill-at-ease, inarticulate person, yet from stray sayings of his, related to hidden elements, or hints, in his paintings, a new Western aesthetic has been built up, schools have stemmed, and a revolution in practice taken place. His canvases as a group still illustrate best the main drifts of modernism, the search for expressive form, the intentional distortion of nature, the reach for abstraction. Placed in the orthodox galleries before Van Gogh's, the canvases of Cézanne proved to many eyes that older painting was by contrast lifeless, empty, inert. For common appreciators as well as for artists and aestheticians, Cézanne marked the turn from one major slope into another.

He was the insurgent who turned the waters back upon the impressionists. Practising with them at first, he recognized the shallowness of their chromatic harmonies and soft-focus surface photography. He said frankly: "I wish to make of impressionism an art solid and durable like that of the museum masters." He chose to study, however, not the realistic painters but those who had incorporated formal rhythms into their canvases—in particular Rubens—not perhaps to be considered a consistent master of formal organization but author of works overflowing with movement and with at times a close-knit plastic structure—and Tintoretto and Poussin. In these artists he found a "durable" thing that the impressionists had lost (and the Courbet school of realists before them).

But never did an artist develop his means less out of the devices of predecessors, more out of his own anguish and vision and study of nature. Although Cézanne violated every law of representation as known to the realists, he clung to nature as a source and inspiration. He searched passionately for the elusive thing he termed "the realization," a fugitive something between a sensation, an intuition, and an image. He glimpsed it perhaps not so much in nature as beyond or through nature. He wanted his art, he said, to afford the feeling of "the eternal in nature." Again he wrote: "The true and endless study is in the diversity of the spectacle of nature." And: "For progress toward realization there is nothing but nature."

Searching, he brought back to painting organized, coherent, structural design. He found, richly, the rhythmic vitality of the Chinese "spiritual" painter. He brought together nature and abstraction—the commonest object and the deepest revelation of cosmic order.

By means evident to the specialist he fixed this element of structural design



*Cézanne Bathers Collection of Mrs. Rutland McCormick, Chicago*

more firmly in his canvas than had any painter since El Greco. The means are of a sort to be mentioned rather than analysed in a history. They concern superimposed and sloping planes, spiral movement, focal points, volume, weight and counterweight, colour, counterpoint, and textural enrichment. In colour use he far surpassed El Greco, for he fused drawing and colouring into one process. He spoke of reducing all shapes in nature to three fundamental forms: the cube, the cone, and the cylinder, and from later application of this idea came the adventure of the cubists. He more often than any other modern made the abstract elements speak eloquently.

More simply stated, there is in the creative picture a dynamic effect, an ordered construction of backward-forward movement elements, which gives life to the composition—and rhythm to the observer's experience. There is

a marked path for the eye, and a counterpoint of fluctuating movement. A Cézanne picture, whether a landscape or a portrait, a still-life or a figure-piece, communicates something of this living abstract "realization," this eternal ordered rhythm, to the spectator who is emancipated from photographic art.

Cézanne's water-colours mark his nearest approach to pure abstraction. But the more successful part of his achievement is perhaps in those landscapes and still-lives wherein the distortion of natural aspects is only slight yet the formal rhythm strong. They are probably giving more æsthetic pleasure to a larger art-trained audience than the works of any other painter who has lived since 1700.

Cézanne by example set the survey stakes within which twentieth-century expressive painting was, in the main, to develop. Before turning however to those who followed directly in his footsteps—cubists, abstractionists, *fauves*, and a large international group who can hardly be called other than "Cézannists"—it is well to glance at certain "rediscovered" moderns, now recognized as having affinity with the master of Aix, and at correlative movements initiated by his fellows, Gauguin and Van Gogh.

Once the retreat from the realistic position began, when a new criterion of formal excellence was being set up, attention was drawn to certain older painters who had instinctively held to "constructed" art: neglected men who undubitably had put into their painting some of the plastic value that Cézanne wanted to preserve out of "museum" art and which he had seen joyously exploited by Titoretto and used with reserve, covered over with rhetoric, by Poussin. El Greco, of course, affords the classic example of a genius obscured and forgotten, then rediscovered by the moderns. There were others in Cézanne's own century.

Of all the rehabilitated nineteenth-century masters, Honoré Daumier is the most lauded today. He is honoured as one of the very great elder moderns. He is the more significant because he is known to have influenced Cézanne at a critical moment. But his pictures are sufficient passport for his entry into the new Pantheon.

Daumier, born in 1808, self-educated in the arts, was considered in his time an effective cartoonist and an accomplished lithographer, but his paintings were officially and popularly thought (except by a few friends) to be without merit.



Daumier: *The Townman*

Those paintings, in today's changed view, are seen to possess the all-important form-quality, the elementary plastic vitality, more richly than the works of any artist contemporary with Daumier. It is considered by some an added virtue that Daumier was at the same time a social historian, that his art reflects life in the Paris of his era, with the colour of his reactions to social inequality, bureaucratic stupidity, and miscarriage of justice.

In technique he belonged distinctly to the phase before impressionism. A student when Delacroix had challenged the cold and mechanical draughtsmanship of the classicists, he rode in on the wave of freer brushing and swift outlining introduced by the romantics, and he preserved something of their dramatic emotion and vigour when he took up with the Courbet realists, with whom he is the oftener grouped by historians. Constrained to work diligently and hastily as a political cartoonist if he cared to eat, he had reason to tie his art to what was close by and familiar. He carries over to his painting something of the broad and simple method of the habitual black-and-white worker. Indeed many of his canvases are practically without colour, and the





Daubner Carl Sketches [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

traces of the rapid draughtsman are seldom hidden by finishing at the hands of the less hurried painter.

But his larger pictures lack nothing of sculptural largeness, compositional fullness, and vigorous movement. He is devoted to common themes, to what he sees on the banks of the Seine, in the third-class railway carriage, in the theatrical only-law courts, or street café. He was one of the earliest to document the struggle of the submerged classes to dramatize hunger and



Daumier *The Uprising* [Phillips Memorial Gallery Washington D.C.]

thievery and injustice. He sometimes carries the cartoonist's barb into the gallery canvas.

Despite these journalistic preoccupations—and this is what matters most a century later—his plastic rhythms are sound and strong. Whether it is a pulsingly alive document picture like *The Uprising* in the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington—an extraordinary example of physical movement conveyed but harnessed as pictorial movement, counterweighted and poised—or a light inconsequential thing like the *Corot Sketching* in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, the formal effect is sure, the pattern pronounced. In his forceful use of human bodies Daumier inevitably calls to mind Michelangelo.

It is one of the tragedies of the early era of democratic art that Daumier was permitted to paint only as a marginal activity. It is apparently still a question whether society should exclude from the opportunity to experiment and create all those not fortunate enough to have inherited incomes as had

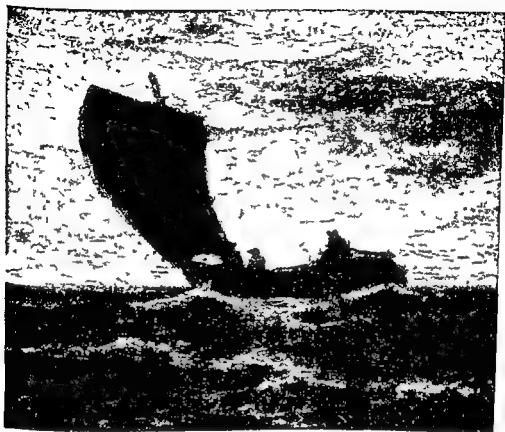
Delacroix, Corot, Manet, and Cézanne in Daumier's time Cramped as he was by lifelong poverty, and his paintings comparatively few in number, he yet lives today, powerfully, with a sort of grandeur which has gone out of the reputations of many artists widely proclaimed in his day The state buried him, not from any wish to do him honour but because he died a pauper

Jean-Louis Forain, a young man of twenty-seven when Daumier died in 1879, also a journalistic commentator by trade, did not succeed so well in pulling his oil paintings up to compositional grandeur and patterned order, but he does reinforce his episode-pictures from law courts and cafes with dramatic lighting and a sure sense of balanced movement He forces his social documents, insists upon pathos or indignation or contempt, as Daumier does not but structurally he is sounder than the academicians to the one side of him and the impressionists to the other

Another rediscovered figure, also an illustrator, is Constantin Guys, who, however, was neither a caricaturist nor a propagandist, but only a recorder of life around him, with a talent that lifted some of his drawings to the estate of masterly design He is some believe, the most characteristic illustrator of the latter half of the nineteenth century, with a nervous shorthand style of drawing that got down precise and animated impressions

A second graphic artist, equally the illustrator but often enough venturing into the field of larger painting, was Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec A cripple who nevertheless ventured into the places of most lurid excitement in Paris the cafes and dives, the law courts and dance-halls, the revue theatres and circuses he turned out records of hothouse metropolitan life that are still exciting He had studied Goya in particular, but tempered the realistic intention with something learned from treasured Japanese prints He has affinity with Degas and is surer in his formal patterning—which is why the moderns turn to him sympathetically but in the end he must be put down as essentially one who enlarged graphic illustrations to the size of wall paintings not without unusual decorative mastery

America has come to recognize one of the neglected masters of formal organization in Albert Pinkham Ryder He had not a whit of Daumier's impulse to satirize or comment upon current life, nor of the passion to illustrate, as reflected in the works of Guys and Toulouse-Lautrec Rather he was remote, impersonal, imaginative He sought mystically to express truths apprehended beyond the surface aspects of nature, and his one great achievement is in endowing his canvases—generally small in area but massive in treatment



Ryder *Toilers of the Sea*

[Courtesy Adlison Gallery of American Art Phillips Academy, Andover Massachusetts]

—with a communicable sense of abstract order. Whether it is his favourite theme of a moonlit sea, or an open landscape, or a scene from legendry or literature, the picture structure is balanced, the pattern effect strong and certain.

Ryder's technique and his plastic mastery well served the spirit of the content of his art: there is clear expression of his own feeling of loneliness among men, of the tragic grandeur of the sea, of a constantly felt order in the universe. He knew himself for a dreamer, for one drawn aside from what men considered the significant life of the day; he was healthy and philosophical, he was poor, frugal and the associate of undistinguished and unpretentious people—all of which has left a mark upon his painting. He is the most con-

siderable painter among Americans, and in his half-century he was unapproached by any English-speaking artist in mastery of picture-making as such. A contemporary of Cézanne, he independently arrived at that understanding of the abstract element in painting, the solid structural framework of it, which the Frenchman was destined to demonstrate as the foundation of the new revolutionary art. Ryder's was a slighter but a distinctive achievement, within the new vision and the new rhythmic statement. He supplies concrete illustrations of that unexplainable thing, mystic visual art.

The other nineteenth-century American who transcended national and school lines, who found a way to put a plastic structure under the realistic-looking surface of his art, was John H. Twachtman. He went to Paris and learned the impressionist broken-colour technique and at first glance his pictures may seem like most fragile Monets. But Twachtman felt the call to realize some deeper order, to use design in expression of abstract rhythm. Belonging by right to the post-impressionist development, he is the oftener catalogued as the greatest American follower of Pissarro and Monet. His luminous, exquisite canvases will be found, by those who have an eye for it, to be characterized by this other form-value, lifting him to a place above all his fellows except Ryder.

It was an American-born painter, Paris-trained, resident in uncongenial London, who first effectively absorbed Oriental attributes into his art, marking the beginning of that decorative stream that intertwines confusedly with the main current of abstract modernism. James Abbott McNeill Whistler is indeed, the chief figure after Gauguin, over on the lighter, sensuously affective side of post-realistic painting.

The decorative school of moderns might be defined as that which deliberately shallows the picture-space, deals generously in linear rhythms and colour harmonies, and generally is content with surface melodies rather than deep contrapuntal orchestration. Texture and finish are here of exceptional moment.

Whistler was twenty years old when he left the United States to take up his art training in Paris. Those Americans who would claim him for their country's art-story have just about as much reason as the French who trained him or the English among whom he practised. He learned most from Velázquez among the European old masters, drowned out a good deal of that influence in his homage to the Japanese, and ended a solitary in Western painting.



Whistler *Portrait of John Ruskin* [Courtesy Corporation Art Gallery Glasgow]

It is something of a critical fashion today to depreciate Whistler and to deny him a place in the modern scene. The extreme finish of his pictures, and a sentimentalism read into his portraits and nocturnes—directly against his own vigorous denials of other than decorative purpose—have laid him open to attack by the red-blooded vigorously dynamic moderns. And of course the intellectualists, moralists, and litterateurs still of pose the necessity

to grant him significance, feeling that his fight for art as its own justification endangers the orthodox tradition. By his provocative propaganda against emphasis upon descriptive and instructive values in painting, he fed fuel to the fire raging over art's meaning. And he became involved as a central figure in a controversy over a possible "art for art's sake."

Those who have an eye for richly formalized art find a very special delight in Whistler's canvases, in a field seldom exploited by Western painters. The famous *Battersea Bridge* is as pretty a piece of abstract plane-arrangement and muted colour-harmony as any achieved by European (or American) artists. Many a "nocturne" or "symphony" or "arrangement" from the same hand has a similar exquisitely decorative and sensuous loveliness. To call it melodious and musical is not at all unreasonable, although when Whistler chose to label his canvases with titles such as *Symphony in White* or *Nocturne Blue and Silver*, the British public and critics considered him impudent and idiotic, even maudlin and insane. Unfortunately Ruskin was drawn into the circle of his enemies, and penned one of the most famous and most ill-judged indictments of an artist in all history, ending with the words "I have seen and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now, but never expected to hear a covecomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."

A widely publicized libel suit followed, Whistler was further disgraced in the eyes of the orthodox, and art came into headlines as seldom before in England. Ultimately Whistler put his thoughts into a brief essay, delivered first as a lecture, under the title *Ten O'Clock*, which is one of the meatest and wittiest of refutations of the pretensions of the realists. It equally showed Whistler as concerned with only a small corner of the field open to the artist.

But that corner is over on the modern side, and such arrangements as the portrait of Carlyle, the portrait of the artist's mother, certain of the riverside nocturnes, and such an interior as *The Artist's Studio*, in Chicago, constitute a body of works consistently planned for formal effects. They are instinct with a controlled plastic animation, touched with unfailing fragile grace. Almost invariably cool in colour and low in tone, and exceedingly sensitive in compositional arrangement, they have their continuing place among the orchid-like, exquisitely dainty products of post-realistic art. Whistler also was a master of etching, his sensitive touch resulting, particularly in his London river scenes and in a Venetian series, in prints as sought after as any in the history of the art, excepting only Rembrandt's.



Whistler *Battersea Bridge* [Courtesy National Gallery, Millbank, London]

The West had lost centuries before the secret of mural painting. Naturalism and particularly the architectural vista in perspective and the deep landscape clashed seriously with the conventions necessary to mural art. A flattened effect, meaning a reduced range of penetration in space and a method of arranging the picture elements in simple planes is at the very heart of wall decoration. In the mid nineteenth century there began a return to flat paint-



ing in the mural technique, and the Frenchman Puvis de Chavannes is remembered as a pioneer. At the same moment the revival of interest in Oriental art and the trend to formalism and abstraction among the pioneers of post-impressionism strengthened the position of the muralists.

Puvis de Chavannes, who lived from 1824 to 1898, is almost the only international figure in the mode, and nothing will be heard of it again until a wave of interest sweeps America in the nineteen-thirties, impelled by the achievements of two Mexicans. So Puvis's walls stand lonesome and exceptional, marking the rediscovery of a technique, and an intrinsic contribution not very forceful but agreeably colourful and tranquilly architectural. His colours are quiet and harmonious, and his compositions are expertly flattened without "unreasonable" violation of natural aspect. One wishes that he might have had a little more of the courage of the expressionists, sacrificing more of nature to design. But perhaps his chief fault is in a rather mechanical disposition of figures, they sometimes seem pasted to the background without adequate relationship to the other elements.

Nevertheless, it was an exceptional reach forward that a man in the midst of naturalistic painters was able to return to architectonic principles and reaffirm the age-old conventions of muralism, not without a certain pale majesty and a charming colourfulness. The main exhibits of his art are at Paris, in the Boston Public Library, and in provincial museum buildings in France, but sizable panels may be found in many American and European art galleries.

In Germany a single artist guessed the importance of the plastic synthesis as a step to decorative ends. Unfortunately his output was slight, but Hans von Marées deserves mention as Germany's most gifted and most original visual artist between the generation of Holbein and the twentieth-century expressionists. He spent twenty years in Italy and died in Rome in 1887.

Paul Gauguin is the most famous—and the most spectacular—figure in the decorative wing of the modernist advance. He was one of the original trio of post-impressionist masters (with Cézanne and Van Gogh), and because his art is less violently expressionistic, and more seductively sensuous and picturesque, not to say lurid, nature of his insurgency. He had been a respectable businessman—a stock broker, when at thirty-five, in 1883, he abandoned business, family, and security to take up painting. He had originality enough to establish, with principles taken to some extent from Cézanne and Van



Gauguin: *The White Horse*. Luxembourg Museum



Van Gogh *Night Café*. Private collection, New York

[Photo, courtesy Museum of Modern Art]

Gogh, one of the three lines of anti realist advance, although his was the least significant of the three

Gauguin carried his decorative method to a certain mastery during his years in France, but found the more stimulating field for his talents in the South Sea Islands. He did not neglect the opportunity to make his gesture of abandoning decadent civilization a theatrical one, and there was doubtless some sincerity in the action. On the other hand, there were bills owing, and there is some question whether Van Gogh did not in a spell of undoubted insanity try to murder Gauguin. What with one such annoyance and another he decided to go where life was simple and primitive. He went to Tahiti.

His flat-patterning, linear harmonies and brilliant colour were well suited to the Tahitian scene and people. He had returned to a tapestry-like lay-out method with little regard for perspective and he had learned to deform

human bodies for volume-weight or repeat-pattern purposes. The semi-nude figures of the Tahitians, and the exotic colouring of landscape and of native clothes, fed his passion for broad, highly coloured decorativeness.

He has left a feast for the eyes, in a body of formally alive, sensuously lovely canvases. No one else in the West has used colour so vividly and recklessly (in the academic view) and yet achieved harmony. No one else has woven colour and line into such compelling melodies. There is not the profound plastic order, the symphonic movement, of Cézanne, but within the limits of flattened, decorative organization Gauguin is supreme.

Of course Gauguin's much-advertised "escape from civilization" proved nothing about the artist in modern society. There was sincere protest behind the abandonment of the sophisticated Parisian world, at the moment of his going, but something of affectation in his laboured barbarism too. He died in wretchedness in the Marquesas Islands, in 1903, just as he would have died in poverty in Paris had he stayed. Considering his flair for the exotic and the Oriental, colourful, he probably painted the more beautiful pictures for having gone to live with "savages." Today leading museums and millionaires compete in purchasing his works at fabulous prices.

"Madness alone is entirely free from the commonplace," commented William Bolitho in an essay upon the painting of Van Gogh. Certainly a streak of what men call insanity seems to have aided this third of the original post-impressionists to achieve a release of the images that formed in the creative chambers of his being. He was the most brilliantly unconventional, the most subjectively passionate, of the pioneer moderns.

There is something of mad intensity, also of primal innocence, about Van Gogh's paintings. They are himself poured out. They are his dreams, his feelings, his inner living made manifest in paints. They were strange at first to other men because they, the spectators, were bound up with all sorts of inhibitions and traditions as to what 'real' life is, as to what proper painting is. They are now accepted and enjoyed, not because we have all become a little mad, but because again the boundaries of experience and of tradition have been pushed out, the field of normal art widened. "Yes," we say, "a yellow sunflower *can* look like that, does have that intensity of dazzling colour, may momentarily light up a universe as it does this picture."

Bolitho, arguing a special revelation out of the Provençal sun, saw the pictures as he saw Van Gogh himself, madly aflame. "His cypress is a green

and yellow fire, with a purple glow at its heart, like a conflagration on a stem."

The vivid intensity of his art, the individualistic quality of his vision, the directness of statement, mark Van Gogh as the typical early expressionist. "Expressionism," as we have seen, is a generic label for the several anti-realistic schools—the seekers after plastic order and abstract realization, the seekers after decorative loveliness through formalization, and these others like Van Gogh who sacrificed natural aspect to an outpouring of inner feeling and passionate imaging. But it was of the last group that the word was first used (in Germany).

When the sponsors of the first-named expressionists went back to seek pioneers and prophets—as sponsors will—they found Van Gogh, still less understood than Cézanne or Gauguin, perfectly illustrating the thesis that art should be an unhampered expression of the artist's passion, of his exceptional way of seeing. He was obviously the great individualist. He had thrown away "finish" and he had distorted trees and human beings, and had filled the sky with flames. It was found, nevertheless, that he had expressed something worth expressing. If he had wholly overlooked the Greek (and the current) rule that "art is imitation," if he had overstepped all existing rules as to moderation in colour and limits of vigorous draughtsmanship, he had done something that, in 1910, already gave delight to a few observers. By 1920 he was canonized as one of the three creators of modernism. By 1936 he was in danger of being "all the rage", in that year a retrospective exhibition of his works at the Museum of Modern Art in New York drew crowds that broke all attendance records, 123 000 people passing the doors.

Vincent Van Gogh was a Dutchman, born in 1853 to the family of a minister. He tried business, as a salesman in an art shop, teaching, and finally preaching in a small way—as pastor of a miserable mining-section flock. In all these vocations he found himself tortured, and ultimately a failure. He sincerely, and madly, wanted a way of spiritual expression, and at the same time a way of unselfish service to mankind. When he was twenty-seven years old, he abandoned everything else to give himself to painting. He was further frustrated, again a failure in the eyes of the world, but his fanaticism, which had wrecked his teaching and his preaching, this time resulted in a clear-flamed expression and, as it appears fifty years later, an individual and unique service to mankind.

In one of the three volumes of letters to his brother, which form a moving



Van Gogh *Self Portrait* Collection Adelaide Milton de Groot New York  
[Photo, courtesy Museum of Modern Art]

and tragic autobiography he writes that his only anxiety is 'how can I be of use in the world cannot I serve some purpose and be of any good?' His brother sent him the little money he could spare, enough to buy paints and the meanest of shelter and food. He lived in Provence during his years of painting, part of the time with Gauguin in rooms at Arles. During a final detention in a sanatorium he committed suicide, believing that he was thus saving himself from total madness. It is not certain that he had sold more than one painting during his lifetime.

The most popular of his works are those flower studies in which he has poured into sunflower and marigold and roses the flaming molten gold of the sun he so loved and almost deified. His landscapes are hardly less sun-drenched and dazzlingly bright—cornfields and flower farms and Provençal



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orchards. But when one turns to the portraits one finds again the brilliant lighting, the revelling in poured-out vivid pigment.

Van Gogh's painting method gives a peculiarly brilliant and fresh aspect to the canvas. The impressionist technique is pushed to a new conclusion: wildly streaks of colour juxtaposed to make each area a field of sinuous brushstrokes, with in extreme cases high ridges of pigment catching the light. But he does not like the other broken-colour painters lose the weight of solids in the luminous surface treatment. He has moreover at times an instinctive sense of volume-and-space organization of structure by planes.

and he is among the masters in his use of textures for formal enrichment. Altogether a blazingly alive technique—within a madman's unearthly glory of colour.

Overlooked in his time, Van Gogh's genius is recognized and almost universally praised today, but no one has walked in his steps or made a school in his name. The German expressionists came nearest to doing this. The wildness, the passionate reach, are apparent particularly in the groups that flourished just after the World War. Emil Nolde, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and Max Pechstein are foremost, perhaps, in a body of painters striving to pour out emotion in vigorous, even explosive technique. They had their own German and Northern mentors: one Edvard Munch, originally from Norway, and Lovis Corinth, who worked out of an impressionist manner into a strongly individualized, careless-of-nature way of statement, with notable grasp of plastic animation. But within this development the outstanding figure is Oskar Kokoschka, an Austrian long resident in Germany, who packs more of virile organization and rugged form into a canvas than any other follower of Van Gogh and Cezanne. There is a quality of ruthlessness in the way in which Kokoschka, Nolde, and Schmidt Rottluff have sought form—at the expense of natural aspect and finished technique.

In France the greatest individualist in this direction within the main current of modernism in that he grasps the significance of the inner abstract architecture of painting, but at the same time leaning to the side of the subjective or emotional expressionists is Georges Rouault.

The reversal of the main trend of Western painting after Cezanne and particularly the efforts of many artists to vault the whole distance back to "instinctive" statement, led to a great deal of talk about a new primitivism. It was then that Negro sculpture was discovered, praised and over-praised to which were added South Seas decorative art, Mayan sculpture, and sundry actual savage masks and weapons. Many artists were affected, particularly by the rich formal realization exhibited in African idols.

The more noteworthy primitivism is to be found, however, in the works of certain artists native to civilized states who, not having contact with savage peoples or ancient relics, reverted to naive statement and formal patterning. These exceptional ones, known as "naturals" to their sophisticated brother artists, seem born with an incorruptible child's innocence in their view of the world—never seeking to be effective or showy or learned—and with an

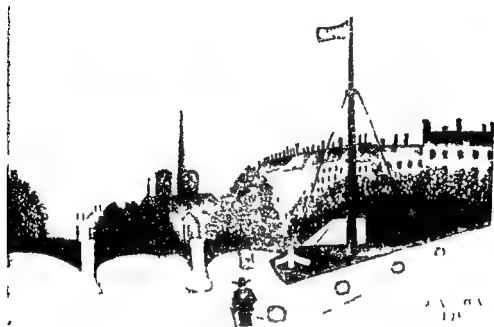


intuitive plastic sense, gaining casually some echo of that order which Cézanne so difficultly struggled to achieve

Of these primitives discovered and hailed by the moderns the foremost was Henri Rousseau, a Frenchman who lived from 1844 to 1910. He was a customs inspector—and therefore known oftenest in the records as *Rousseau le douanier*—and so could paint only on Sundays. Untutored in art, little educated in any direction, he conceived a passion for painting when he was middle-aged. His canvases are likely to be decorative, in which case he beautifully preserves the mural flatness, the tapestry-like treatment in simple planes or else charmingly naïve depictions of familiar life: his family promenading or in the parlour, the banks of the Seine, or Sunday afternoon scenes in the park. But what gives validity to them is the formal excellence, which the man came to without that long process of study, reasoning, and experiment which the "regular" painters had to resort to.

There is, in a world still overrun with dull academic and futilely photographic painting, a particular delight in the little unpretentious fancies and occasional sly fresh humour discoverable in Rousseau's work. It is a small contribution, but distinctive and imaginative and ingratiating.

America by virtue of its broad expanse and its remoteness from school centres, with its consequent lack of uniformity and sophistication, had a more than average share of intuitively gifted formalizing artists, and since the first general recognition of modernism there has been fitful activity in discovering "American primitives"—meaning not the native Indian relics but the works of those painters who carried on European ideals according to provincial understanding. The resultant gallery exhibits from the late seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the early nineteenth centuries are frequently diverting and sometimes richly rewarding in terms of sheer pictorial-plastic experience. There are no outstanding masters, in the world view. But it may be fairly said that in the decades of the great portrait masters in England, say from 1750 to 1830, although the colonial painters were inferior to the homeland artists in glamour and dash and elegance, they were superior in the feeling for formal structure and plastic solidity. Almost any art museum or historical museum shows examples that are little less than masterly in construction. The naïve current continued on into the twentieth century, and if the exploited figures fail to approach Rousseau in stature, there are a sly charm and an unconventional freshness in the romantic landscapes of Louis Elishemius, and in the panoramas of John Kane—which are definitely a 'folk



Rousseau *Scene on the Seine*

Phillips Memorial Gallery, Washington D.C. [Photo, courtesy J. B. Neumann]

art" survival. Somewhere between a natural gift and a studied understanding of plastic principle lies the simple and effective designing, in almost stark terms, of Matthew Barnes.

Naïve primitivism is in any case a side-road of modern art, and conscious imitation of antique primitives or of contemporary savages has led only into blind alleys. The effect of Negro sculpture (and Mayan and Polynesian) upon European and American has in general been broadening and beneficial, but only when the artists have not attempted to duplicate actual effects. It takes little study to recognize that the body of modern art has more affinity with primitive than with European realistic art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as also it has affinity with Italo-Byzantine and Siennese developments, which the realists called "primitive" for their stiffness and formalism at the expense of naturalness. But the affinity is rightly one of principle

and structure, not of imitated aspect. One of the lessons learned from a study of "modern primitives" is that copying an Aztec motive or sailing to Tierra del Fuego or Easter Island will not make a sophisticated painter a good formal artist. But knowing the excellences of Polynesian or African carving will make easier for the layman the comprehension of values in not only Rousseau but Cézanne and Matisse and Rouault and Kandinsky.

The intensely subjective school of expressionists, the decorative wing, and the "naturals" are severally important, but in the end the main path of modernism seems to have been run from Cézanne, through the cubists and the *fauves*, to the varied schools of abstractionists and near-abstractionists. Many of the artists concerned are still living and the controversies over the merits of the several schools and over their diverse aims still rage. So the historical account is likely to be confused, and of course tentative. Some experts end on the achievement of an absolute art of abstraction. Others are certain that the new school of muralists, working on an abstract core but intensely conscious of social drifts in their subject-matter, has snatched the torch of creativeness. A more cautious appraisal is likely to find these two developments—as instanced, say, in the works of Kandinsky on the one hand and Orozco and Rivera on the other—as the extreme poles of one common body of modern art, and the two groups of practitioners bound in a common debt to Cézanne.

In the days of impressionist experiment there was an artist who in a small group of canvases attained to a formal mastery that at times rivals Cézanne's and in a surface technique distinctively individual. Georges Seurat has often been termed a neo-impressionist by reason of his adherence to the broken-colour method and especially to the *pointilliste* system of building up areas of colour with dots or pellets of pigment. But it has been recognized by later analysts that his painstaking technique went to accentuate an underlying abstract rhythm as nicely adjusted as that in a Hiroshige print or a Ming landscape. The arrangement of linear elements, recessive planes, and textural patterning in the *Landscape* of the Samuel Courtauld Collection in London, or in the monumental *Sunday on Grande Jatte Island* at Chicago, will well repay study for gradually emerging rhythm and sub-rhythms.

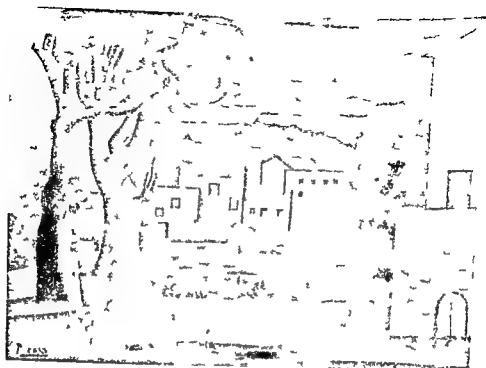
Even in black-and-white reproduction the *Landscape* indicates how definitely the artist has returned to a concern with design as such, as against natural appearances, with consciously manipulated form as against descriptive



Seurat *Landscape* Collection Samuel Courtauld London

documentation. It may be added that simply as a tonal study the picture is as subtle as any by the tone-mad impressionists and yet it has this other profound dignity of structure too. Seurat died at the age of thirty-two in 1891. He might had he lived on have been one of the universal masters. As it is the very slight body of completed works assures him praise in every history or analysis of recent art.

The cubists had a very definite place in the historic sequence of schools but their importance is finally seen as due to a clarification of theory rather than to a contribution intrinsically rich or broad. They served to demolish the last pretence of the sacredness of 'art as imitation'. By their arrangements of planes—the planes of the natural object disassembled and rearranged in more affective compositions—they increased knowledge of the ways in

*Picasso Landscape*

which the several painter's means serve to create movement within the canvas. They gave hints of the nature of the internal rhythmic orchestration which had been recognized in Cézanne's work but not explained. Some of the compositions of Georges Braque and of Pablo Picasso within the strictest cubistic technique give back a refreshing if tenuous pleasure. They are supreme in one very small field of abstract expression. They can hardly be on the high road to the future of painting art, however, when they almost entirely eliminate colour.

Picasso is known in a dozen other pastures. He has been an indefatigable experimentalist, and not seldom producer of sound and intriguing pictures. He went from his native Spain to Paris in 1903, at the age of twenty-two. Some of his best works appeared soon after, when he first "took up with the moderns." He then turned to form-seeking along the lines marked out by Cézanne, and in the so-called blue and pink periods produced canvases



Picasso *The Blue Boy* Collection Ed and M M Warburg New York

richly formalized but without radical distortion or suppression, of nature. Then followed cubism. Later he did an amazing series of about-faces, to and from apparent realism, from and to abstraction. And often he proved himself creative, individual, distinguished. He continues to be, in the nineteen-thirties, unpredictable and original. Almost any one of his pictures or sketches has an air of sureness, a touch of formal magic.

Another versatile and exceptionally gifted Parisian painter has been André Derain, but he has proved himself less a leader and originator than a sensitive follower. Some of his finest work was done when he was, by evidence of the canvases, a Cezannist. He was one of the *fauves*, then was influenced by cubism, veered toward other sorts of abstraction, finally became a comparative independent. The *fauves*, or "wild men," were a group brought together as exhibitors in 1905, representing various degrees of unorthodoxy. Among them were many of those who are today the "solid moderns" of French painting. Raoul Dufy, Dunoyer de Segonzac, Georges Rouault, Maurice de Vlaminck, Henri Matisse.

Of those who were *fauves*, Matisse is most widely considered a world master. He experimented in near-abstraction, but being influenced especially by Gauguin, then by Oriental art (Persian in particular), he fell on the side of the decorators. It is not rash to say that today he is the greatest frankly decorative painter in the Western world. He retains an anchor in objective reality, uses faces and bodies, flowers and furniture, but he has no interest in the natural character of these things, weaves shallow colour and line and texture harmonies from them, in deliciously patterned arabesques. His touch is unmistakable, his compositions always bright and animated, his place as foremost decorator secure.

Somewhere between the starkly decorative method of Matisse and the soft, hazy colour-harmonizing of the impressionists is the appealing art of Pierre Bonnard. With more than a hint of the sensuous, even voluptuous quality of Renoir, he has his own way of embedding linear or structural design while capitalizing the broken-colour surface technique. He is one of the soundest of the recent men claiming, in the fullest sense, the title "colourist."

At the extreme pole from Matisse and Bonnard are the several groups of French painters seeking expression in absolute abstraction. They are carrying on what seems to many observers to be a main line of experiment toward the future of the art. But there are no outstanding names. The latest "sensation" in Paris has been the rise of the post-war school of *surréalistes*. It took



Matisse *The Moorish Screen* Collection Robert Treat Paine 2nd, Boston  
[Photo, courtesy Museum of Modern Art]

over the task, earlier assumed by the wartime dadaists, of demolishing the pretensions, principles, and reputations of realists, Cézannists, cubists, and other established schools, and then it set out on its own creative adventure, which is in the realm of a "dream reality", very intellectual, very Freudian, and in the direction of a different sort of sense-realism rather than anti-realistic. But this is too new to belong to history.

Paris with its Montmartre and its Latin Quarter continued to draw students



from all of Europe and the Americas during the decades between the impressionist revolt and the opening of the World War. It was the centre of experiment for the Western world, and practically all the accomplishment within the expressionist revolution is easily related to the pioneering of Cezanne, Van Gogh, Seurat, and Gauguin. The only other considerable point of study and new departure was Munich. But generally speaking, it was the studios of Paris that provided the routine training for routine-minded artists from all over the world, that fed the creative spirit of the inventive ones. Some studied and stayed on in Paris: Picasso the Spaniard, the Italian Modigliani, and the Rumanian sculptor Brancusi. Others of the giants destined to make history partook of the Parisian training and inspiration, then returned to practise in their native lands: such were Rivera of Mexico and the German sculptor Lehmbruck.

Germany came nearest to establishing an independent and truly creative school of modernism in painting. The subjective expressionists flourished from about 1905 to 1930. Their beginnings may be found in the history of a school called *Die Brücke*, "The Bridge" in Dresden. It was with this group that Nolde, Schmidt Rottluff and Pechstein were brought to international notice, and they were the first to be called specifically "expressionists." It is worth noting, as indicating the exceptional divergence from Paris, that the Scandinavian pioneer, Edvard Munch, was their first mentor and that exotic sculpture had a strong influence upon them: and that it was less the Latin Cezanne than the Northern born Van Gogh who became their idol among the French post-impressionists.

The more important later development in Germany was the post-war gathering of an international group around the radical architectural industrial school, the Bauhaus: first at Weimar, then at Dessau. Painting there was bound up in the work (and the teaching) of four cosmopolitan figures: the Russian Kandinsky, the Swiss Klee, the German-American Feininger, and the Polish Jawlenski. All but the last-named were specialists in non-representational painting: so much so that the impulse toward an absolute abstract art is considered to have centred in Germany during the post-war decade.

Wassily Kandinsky, born in Russia in 1866 but resident during his later creative years in Germany, was in 1900 producing pictures hardly more distinctive than those of any other impressionist: although marked by more than usual compositional coherence. Slowly his style metamorphosed from a



Derain: *Landscape*. Blist Collection, Museum of Modern Art

realistic phase, into a decorative-illustrational phase, with peasant art affinities, and then into an increasing reach for underlying abstract rhythms; until in 1910 he was experimenting in formal organizations with only the vaguest recollective reference to nature. Finally there were long series of "improvisations," "impressions," and "compositions," sometimes wholly abstract, more often with faint hints of "subject-matter."

For a time Kandinsky worked from the hypothesis of a visual scale corresponding to the scale of aural vibrations, and he used musical terminology freely. There was much studio talk about painting as colour-music. But later theory is based less on the assumption of a correspondence in scale, more on the vision of an art parallel to music in its independence from sense-impressions out of nature, but equally free in creative expression, according to its own slowly unfolding and particular laws.

Kandinsky is an avowed mystic and definitely describes his paintings as soul-expression. Those who distrust any but "natural" sight and intellectual meaning deny his compositions other than a sensuous loveliness. But the audience has steadily increased which apprehends in his pictures a profound formal expressiveness, accepting it even as an echo of cosmic order.

Of the *Improvisation No. 30* reproduced here the artist once wrote "The 'content' of the picture is what the spectator *lives* or *feels* while under the effect of the form and colour combinations." He explained a definite intention for each element of the organization: the cross-like main motives, the plane arrangement, the colour areas in relation to two main centres of interest, and the interplay of lines and contours. Regarding the roughly indicated cannon in one corner he said "I did not intend to give a representation of war."

Paul Klee is a lesser figure, known almost exclusively by modestly small pictures, scattered over a great range of territory from absolute abstraction to surrealist objectivity and grotesques. He is one of those artists who produce pictures which seem at first glance no more consequential than the scratch-drawings of children, but each with a teasing formal appeal. Apparently everything he touches, whatever the subject-matter or lack thereof, has a hint of formal magic. Recently Klee has been grouped oftenest with the *surrealistes* of Paris, although his fragile dream fantasies antedated the formation of the school by many years.

The Nazi regime in Germany has discouraged or effaced the several modernist groups, according to the degree of their radicalism—actually closing the Bauhaus and suppressing its activities (The artists there had not found near-abstract art incompatible with socialistic ideals.) The German museums which had installed the world's finest public displays of post-realistic art, have been remade subordinating the moderns to "more normal" manifestations, and particularly to something considered typical Nordic expression. The expressionists have been eviled or curbed, and representative examples of their work have been brought together in a "Chamber of Horrors."

Thus the hands that marked the progress of art evolution are artificially stayed. But two of the less radical of the earlier German insurgents have come in for both homeland and international appreciation: Karl Hofer and Franz Marc, who was killed in the World War. Marc had been particularly influenced by the cubists, and he practised for a time in a field close to absolute



Kandinsky *Improvisation No. 30* [Courtesy Art Institute Chicago]

abstraction. But his later fame has been won through pictures in which the formal rhythms are clearly built around familiar animal forms. Perhaps the favourite one is *The Three Horses*, wherein an explicit underlying structure is made manifest in agreeable linear rhythms with elementary tonal counterpoint. In various places the later and 'wilder' German expressionists, exiled or carry on their creative work most notably Max Beckmann in Paris.

The leading countries of Europe have all contributed essentially to the modern movement in its later years. Italy, where the futurists created such excitement about 1910 with a theory and a method which turned out to be



Marc: *The Three Horses*. Folkwang Museum, Essen [Photo, courtesy J B Neumann]

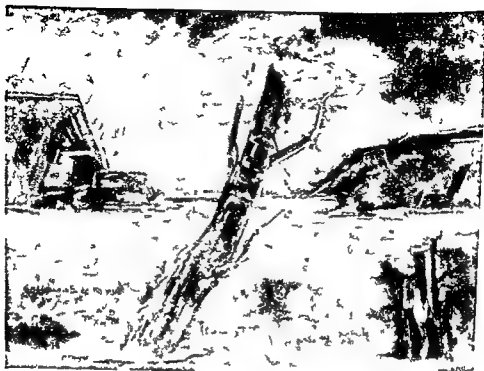
a superficial variation of realistic illustration, sent key men to the international centre at Paris: most notably Giorgio de Chirico and Amedeo Modigliani. The latter's figure paintings, which would be stark except for their linear harmonies (hinting of his great admiration for the Italian primitives), are among the least frightening of the products of expressionism. They became immensely popular as soon as the artist had tragically died in 1920. Carlo Carrà is one of today's soundest practitioners within objective terms, only slightly modified for strong structural accenting.

The Russians, besides contributing the leader Kandinsky to the German school, are represented in Paris by Marc Chagall, who has committed what the realists consider some of the wildest excesses of expressionism. He is represented also by some of the richest and most decorative of imaginative painting, in the range between naïve primitivism and the dream-fantasies of the *surréalistes*. The Dutch Piet Mondrian is associated with Hans Arp in Paris in the leadership of a group called "neo-plasticists," experimenting in geometrical abstraction, in terms of area-adjustment and colour harmonies.



Conder *Stage* [Courtesy National Gallery, Millers, London]

In England a long path of progress might be marked from the cautious insurgency of Walter Sickert and P. Wilson Steer pioneers in the famous protest society organized in 1885 the New English Art Club into the vigorous selective realism of Sir William Orpen and the borderline intellectualism of Augustus John through varied phases of frankly reflected French post impressionism to the welter of unfocused experiment evident in London in this decade. But the body of British painting of the half-century after 1885 is singularly weak in grasp of those formal values which have been at the heart of the achievement in France and Germany and even the English would be at a loss to suggest one of their recent painters who approaches world importance. Most gifted and original perhaps is Paul Nash who markedly weaves abstract patterns but within limits set by an intellectual approach and a draughtsman's (rather than a colourist's) technique. The national tradition in England is still strongly realistic, illustrational. Recogn-



Weber *The Broken Tree* [Pl. to courtesy J. B. Neumann]

nizable mastery lies in a modified impressionism rather than in the fields opened by the expressionists and particularly in such deft and charming if slight landscapes as those of Charles Conder whose *Sunrises* is illustrated.

In the United States painting and sculpture in the twentieth century have been more independent although there have been no leaders of the stature of Matisse, Picasso or Kandinsky. In the years before the recognition of Cézanne's significance a few painters had pioneered in their own distinctive ways some of them notably Eakins and Twachtman inspired directly by contacts with the life of Paris but inventive enough to touch into unmistakably original expression others particularly Ryder consistently individualistic and remote. But it was the Armory Show in New York in 1913 that shocked America into awareness of French modernism at the same time bringing about a focus of American effort. Progress in the quarter-century since

can best be charted by reference to the pattern of French achievement. In other words, in the final accounting there is no mistaking that the bulk of American creative painting is heavily indebted to the studios of Paris.

The routine showing—disregarding the academicians and other realists—could be illustrated by listing groups obviously connected with the successive French schools: a large number of competent Cézannists; a vigorous reflection of fauvism, not without native flavour; a small group of accomplished cubists; and finally, and most rich in independent creativeness, a group of adventurers in non-representational or near-abstract fields. It is among these last, painters seeking an art self-contained, owing little to literary and associative values, that one finds the few names likely to last long in history.

The group of creative insurgents who, immediately before and after 1913, were carrying on the main tradition of international radicalism included Max Weber, Walt Kuhn, Marsden Hartley, and Abraham Walkowitz. They are the old established moderns of New York today. In a minor vein of decorative painting, Maurice Prendergast was outstanding, and the more significant for the development of a technique not precedented in Europe. Arthur B. Davies, too, had an individualistic poetic talent, but without great vigour. George Bellows, had he not died young in 1925, might have scored the most typically American triumph. Dealing with the least sentimental aspects of life around him, he had begun to exhibit at the end an exceptional formal mastery. His best canvases seem at home in the best international company.

But the more creative advance is that of the few who lean toward non-representation. Chief among them is John Marin. He is perhaps a more vital creator than any other painter using the water-colour medium today. His pictures are vigorously, almost explosively alive. They are deeply rhythmic and show sheer originality. They range from landscapes recognizably true to topographic character, through a sort of emotional outpouring in terms of distorted representation, to virtual abstraction.

The abstract element enters strongly also into the very individualistic work of Georgia O'Keeffe, an unpredictable and intuitive painter, whose approximations of flower forms and of landscapes have a clean, clear beauty almost geometrical. She has strength with a feminine exquisiteness of finish. John Cartoll recently has emerged as the most certain of the native artists who avoid marked distortion yet obviously are interested in achieving deeply affective plastic values. A Japanese long resident in New York, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, is likewise a seeker for a secret pictorial vitality, unembarrassed





*Marin Wind on Land and Sea [Courtesy An American Place]*

by naturalistic purpose. The group of sometime realists who have realized the larger importance of the abstract element has been enlarged by the coming of Henry Mattson. His *Wings of the Morning* indicates how strong may be the abstract interest even within types of painting not radically anti-realistic.

Almost every recent treatise upon American art would tend to show that, popularly and in local criticism, the more significant painting is considered to be that of the depictees of "the American scene" and of the realistic satirists of urban life, the proponents of that sort of thing arguing that the human and social values of native illustration outweigh the nebulous virtues of plastic excellence. Granting the larger sentimental and intellectual appeal of the works of the vigorous regionalists, one finds lacking as yet the universal

art-value that might lift localism to world importance. When the illustrators of Western pioneer life or of metropolitan night-life and slums inform their pictures with that profounder value, their painting rises above satire or social documentation. The paintings of John Stuart Curry, by reason of such folded-in value, raise him somewhat above other practitioners in the American-scene group, and a similar element of underlying animation lifts the urban studies of Reginald Marsh to a larger significance. The late George Overbury ("Pop") Hart occasionally added similar pictorial aliveness to his transcripts from life.

Among the "socially conscious" painters of America, however, the most masterly hand is that of George Grosz, now resident on this side of the Atlantic, but a German who spent his formative years among the European expressionists. A great deal of his representational painting has been bitingly, even bitterly satiric, not without cruel and even horrible implications. But in the wide range of his art there is evidence of other accomplishments less disturbing, with admirable strength, sensitivity, and directness of statement. Grosz might be taken as a symbol of the artist endowed with a gift approaching genius thrown into the chaotic cauldron of contemporary civilization, struggling to find some point at which art—which presupposes a certain calm and detached imaging—can be used in service to society.

Socially one of the most striking phenomena of recent times has been the post-war return to mural decorations, which may point the way to the next great culmination of the painting art. This may be the one point at which all the advances and rediscoveries will come together: the Oriental mastery of decorative means and formal structure, the plastic rhythm or synthesis as developed from Cézanne to the purists, and the expression of a social ideology. If in these pages there has been a tendency to credit the moderns of 1880-1930 with making their more impressive advance in the mastering of non-representational elements, it is not necessarily to imply that painting with human and social content has come to an end. The outstanding gain has been in the discovery or recovery of deep and musical values in art near abstraction, but the special enjoyments in that range of art are merely different from, not destructive of, the painting that has theme and meaning.

It is to the credit of a little group of Mexicans that they have, without weakening of the abstract structure, restored painting that is socially meaningful, even instructive and thought-provoking. They have widened the boundaries of modern painting, showing how the grasp upon formal organ-

ization can be made to serve within mural-art limitations, exhibiting, moreover, the first notable union of regional or social content with organizational mastery

Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco are the outstanding creative figures in the Mexican group. Rivera studied in Spain and in Paris, found in Cézanne's pictures the magic that determined the future course of his art, was an intimate of Picasso and the cubists, learned too from Giotto's frescoes, and returned to Mexico to plunge into the workers' rebellion. His best work is in murals designed for schools and other public buildings in Mexico, utilizing native materials, and usually flavoured strongly with socialistic ideas and propagandist purpose. There are a number of Rivera's representative works on walls in the United States, but with less of the characteristic directness and conviction. Orozco is a more original figure, with the stronger mastery of plastic effect, and he is equally devoted to art as a reflection of the emerging workers' world, if not a weapon to help secure its coming. His works are generally less accessible, but he is to be listed with the living masters.

While these two have worked with themes "of a certain magnitude," others of the Mexicans have made contributions in a wide range from abstraction to monumental story-telling. Carlos Merida is a leader in non-representational design. Rufino Tamayo, Carlos Orozco Romero, and David Alfaro Siqueiros are others of one of the most remarkable groups of inventive painters in the present-day art scene. If it seems surprising that so powerful an expression of modernism should appear in a country with a mixed Latin and Indian inheritance not earlier known for achievement in the arts, there is perhaps a hint of the reason in the often-remarked affinity of modern art and the manifestations known as primitive.

Michelangelo laid down his tools in the mid-sixteenth century, and sculpture as a creative art then virtually ceased to exist, so that there is scarcely a name to be remembered during the following three hundred years. Realistic practice continued, and sculpture was continually written about as a major art. The Germans for a time kept alive the tradition of wood-carving. There came an episode of French court sculpture, a sort of photography in statuary with added baroque flourishes, of which Houdon was the chief practitioner. But the art was to all creative purposes dead from 1550.

After that date neither Italy nor Spain, nor France nor Germany produced an internationally memorable figure. In all English history, until the twentieth



*Matsen Wins the Mine* [Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art]

century there was never a sculptor whose name need be recalled. Holland and Belgium were equally uncreative. A good case could be made out for the thesis that the Western world produced not a single sculptural genius between Michelangelo and Lehmbruck between 1550 and 1910. The nearest approach—the name will have leaped to the reader's mind, no doubt—was in the work of Auguste Rodin.

Rodin, however, is to be considered the final figure in the march of realism. He refined naturalism to the last point: in statues so lifelike that he had to prove by demonstration that he had not actually made casts from the human figure. In other works he accepted the impressionist theories, fixing in clay or stone the momentary attitude or gesture, and playing with the surface for effects of shimmering light and indeed the stippled or rippled finish affords a pretty vibration unprecedented in earlier work. In a very few late statues Rodin pushed over into a sort of subjective expressionism, as in the *Balzac* that Paris spectacularly rejected.

The revolutionary change came about 1900, when an international movement got under way toward the overthrow of impressionism—and all other varieties of sculpture dependent upon transcribed natural effects—and toward the achievement of non-representational values. A few men began by simplifying the masses of their work, returning to the natural blockiness of sculpture. They definitely, even self-consciously, worked to restore the stony look of the statue (as against the light painty aspects that had developed with the lapse into clay modelling). As regards the subject-matter, they discounted the surface view and distorted freely for characteristic structure and intensified feeling.

In short, the twentieth-century sculptor became an expressionist, became careless as to nature in order to express at a higher degree of intensity (1) his own feelings, (2) the characteristic values of his sculptural medium, and (3) the inner as against the surface character of the model.

In France, Aristide Maillol was a pioneer in the process of simplification and return to typical sculptural largeness and reposefulness. He achieved also a certain measure of abstract rhythm although he seldom ventured into arbitrary distortion of nature's forms. Antoine Bourdelle departed even less from the currently popular impressionistic canons, but he had a sound architectural sense. He produced some compactly designed panels and two or three of his free-standing groups are among the most popular exhibits within "the new sculpture," by reason of an exceptional aspect of power and animation. The truer revolutionary was Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, a genius who was killed in the World War at the age of twenty-four. His few mature works are instinct with the love of heavy sculptural materials as such, and with a passion for expression in massive, even mountainous terms.

In France since the war the leader of the moderns has been the Rumanian Constantin Brancusi, who has at times cleared sculpture of almost the last traces of representation, achieving forms affective by their exquisite geometrical poise and their intensified sensuous charm. It is doubtful that many of his abstractions will rank as immortal works, but he has done more than any one else to open a new field of extreme formalism to sculptors, and his "statues" possess a distinctive appeal to observers who are not still bound in fealty to the realists.

The Germans pioneered in expressionist sculpture and produced, in Wilhelm Lehmbruck, its foremost master. Among the early radicals Franz Metzner was most notable. But the one genius—not only in German but



Rodin *Balzac* Rodin Museum, Paris

perhaps in all twentieth-century sculpture to date—was Lehmbruck, who began work about 1900, spent a decade in Düsseldorf, then two or three years in Paris, returned to Germany, and for a time lived in Switzerland during the war years. He committed suicide in his Berlin studio in 1919 at the age of thirty-eight. His work—"only a torso" as his biographer puts it—has the typical modern directness and strength but with extreme sensitivity. It also has the typical "distortion", which has militated against its wide popular acceptance except in pre-Nazi Germany.

Certain of the figures and busts are characterized by the heaviness, by the

organization of elementary masses, that belonged to the first phase of revolt against naturalistic over-elaboration. Later Lehmbruck developed a method of elongation of forms, evidently out of a search for elusive sculptural values similar to Cézanne's search for the "plastic realization" in painting. Most famous of the examples in this technique of distortion by attenuation is the *Kneeling Figure*.

Of the post-war sculptors in Germany, Georg Kolbe has been the most appreciated both at home and abroad. He began as an impressionist, gradually simplified his way of statement and strengthened the abstract structure, emerging in the nineteen-twenties as a world leader of the moderate wing of the radicals. Ernst Barlach also travels an acceptable middle way.

Similar tempered insurgency is illustrated in the works of the Swedish sculptor Carl Milles (lately resident in the United States). He reaches a higher degree of expression by surface formalization, in harmony with architectural environment, rather than by the heedless subjective-emotional approach. He is the world's best-known "decorative" sculptor today. The Yugoslav Ivan Meštrović has become a popular international figure by similar considered and slight deviation from the older formulas. His masterpiece is a series of stylized figures incidental to a memorial chapel at Cavtat near Ragusa.

In England sculpture took its place among the creative arts for the first time well after the turn of the century. Eric Gill, with an exceptional "feel for the stone," has been the leading native figure, although recently Frank Dobson and Henry Moore have shown a more determined reach for the monumental plastic rhythm—the one along the line of Maillol-like simplification, the other in unashamed distortions. But the man who fought the fight for modernism in England, setting artistic London by the ears again and again, is the Jewish-American Jacob Epstein.

Epstein went to London at the age of twenty-five, in 1905, and has been an individualistic creator in the years since—going forward with the "wildest" experimenters and most sensitive innovators, but again lapsing back to an impressionistic technique and aim. His most characteristic work is, perhaps, in the field of psychologic portraiture, with a somewhat exaggerated clay-pellet technique. Closer to the main current of modernism are the monumental figures upon public buildings in London, sculpturally expressive but sufficiently architectural.

If the United States lost to England a great creative figure in Epstein, it gained another in the coming of Gaston Lachaise from France in 1906. At



Lehmbruck K. li 3 Figur



the time of his death in New York in 1935 he was recognized as an elder master among American modernists. He has left a body of work ranging from sensitive impressionism, through strongly formalized simplifications, to ruthless distortion for plastic intensification. Among those who have added abstract sculptural values to a "natural" statement, in a guarded modernism calculated not to offend the realistic-minded, William Zorach is notable, if only because he gives the stone full validity and conceives the composition in massive rhythms. In the more radical direction, and known throughout the world as an innovator, is Alexander Archipenko, a Ukrainian who was a leading figure in Germany before he came to the United States in 1924. He has done more radical experimentation in sculptural mediums and methods than any other modern. His happiest results, many feel, have been in a near-abstract sort of composition derived from the human figure, manipulated for mass-relationships, yet with deft capitalization of linear harmonies and of the sensuous surface values of metals or glazed clay.

If sculpture stood still between 1550 and 1900, playing with varying forms of surface imitation of nature, architecture in the same period lapsed into that strange sort of imitation known as eclecticism. Engineers and builders developed new principles and new materials, and modified the structural core of the building, but the academic architect had the last word, and draped over the front one of his stereotyped façades, in Gothic or Greek, Renaissance or Romanesque, Byzantine or Roman.

It seems to the present historian that each of these types of architecture had validity in its own time, and should be discussed in relation to that time; furthermore, it is unimportant that the builders of the Pantheon in Paris and Grant's Tomb in New York chose a "classic" style, that Princeton University and Yale University chose the Gothic. The structures usually paraded as the masterpieces of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century architecture, the Madeleine and the Brandenburg Gate, Blenheim and the House of Parliament, are records of what builders did when there was no creative architecture. It will perhaps seem to future generations a matter for amazement that the authorities in the nineteenth century agreed that all possible styles had been invented, giving architectural students portfolios of historic façades to be adapted as masks, believing that engineering is something to be hidden, not expressed.

The story of architecture is important again in the late nineteenth century



*Lachaise Head Collection Mrs Q A Sha McKean Boston  
[Photo courtesy Museum of Modern Art]*

Then the ranks of the eclectics were broken. The first burst of creative insurgency came in America when Louis Sullivan declared war on the imitators of a dead past, particularly castigating the pseudo-classicists of the nineties. It was Sullivan who started the battle-cry that has sounded so often in the forty years since. Form must follow function. He had added training as an engineer to his education as decorator and his first effort was to get back to expression based on engineering. Each building material each part, Sullivan



Barlach *Head*, from a war memorial Collection Edward M. M. Wirburg New York

pointed out has a structural function determined by the engineer let it be declared—not hidden behind a mask of historical surface forms It is hardly too much to say that in the machine age each building part functions as a machine part let the dynamics of it be declared

And so, forty years after Sullivan's first efforts one comes to the American skyscrapers that do simply and marvellously express their materials and their engineering their soaring and their beehive function and to houses that are space made livable, with a concrete wall here and a glass screen there no longer subject to the tyranny of masonry

It was Frank Lloyd Wright at first a student and apprentice with Sullivan then a creator in his own right and with an intenser originality who fought the fight for expressive building through the first twenty years of the new

century, who at last is recognized as the first modern master of architecture. His early prairie-type houses in the Chicago area, his industrial buildings, his concrete-block houses in California—all these were challenges to his eclectic fellow-architects, each building reflecting a new way of approach to the art, each expressive of its site and use, and each touched with the special creative individuality of Wright the artist.

After Wright's first quarter-century of practice, after 1920, modern architecture in America and in Europe turned to the task of gaining a standardized basis, of determining a new maximum expressiveness of functional use and of industrial-age materials and structural methods, with the elimination of every element or detail that might be considered merely ornamental. There came thus the 'functionalist' architecture which was particularly popular in Holland and pre-Nazi Germany, and latterly in Italy.

There had been pioneers in Europe in the days of Sullivan's and Wright's earliest insurgency, most notably H. P. Berlage in Holland, and Otto Wagner and Joseph Hoffmann in Vienna. As the machine-age sheerness and functionalist logic gained ground, a new internationalism developed, the later leaders being the French-Swiss Le Corbusier and the German (later in London, now in America) Walter Gropius.

Nearest to creator of a distinctive style in Europe, and therefore nearest a master in the individualistic sense in which Wright is one, is Mies van der Rohe, a German. He has most successfully expressed the idea of architecture as space conditioned for living as against the idea of architecture as primarily weight-bearing walls. In the United States the ultra-simple "machine house" is best known through the work of William Lescaze of New York and Richard J. Neutra in California. There is hardly a country in the Western world but claims a start toward this architecture of a new age and a new way of visioning.

It may be that all the men named are more important as pioneers and as contributors to theory than as creators of permanently significant monuments, that these are the seers and prophets rather than the masters of a new world-architecture. But the fact of an epochal revolution remains. Architecture again is functional, expressive, non-imitative. There is excitement in the towers of Manhattan and Chicago, a deep-seated delight in the horizontal-accent houses along the California coast, in Italy, in Stuttgart or Czechoslovakia, and delight over the promise of round houses. The tame virtues of a three-hundred-year-old eclecticism are ended.

There has been extensive and sometimes bitter discussion over the question. Are the fine arts finished? It has seemed to the materialists (who had perhaps failed ever to experience profoundly any art) that a practical industrialized, intellectually emancipated civilization might have no place for painting, sculpture, and the more delicate crafts. The machine, by standardization in mass production, had debased the ornamental crafts, had apparently crowded out the arts. Science, it was argued, would provide other occupations and appreciations.

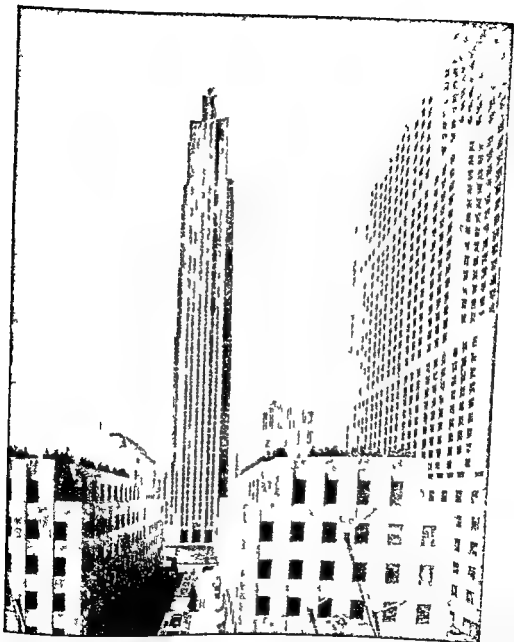
It was a view short-sighted and not a little illogical. The profounder certainty is that the machine, taking over the work-burden of mankind, will free men more than ever before to practise and to enjoy in those fields immemorably considered the highest to which the human faculties can be given, the spiritual and the æsthetic. Science instead of destroying art is in a sense, on the verge of giving for the first time in history adequate time for production, and universal leisure to enjoy.

It is doubly interesting then to note that science also, beside opening an enlarged way to art, imparts a style to most of the objects formerly shaped by hand. The very use of machines as manufacturing tools tends to establish recognizable style-marks to determine a basic likeness, in everything "manufactured" in a body of mass-produced objects created by 'industrial designers'."

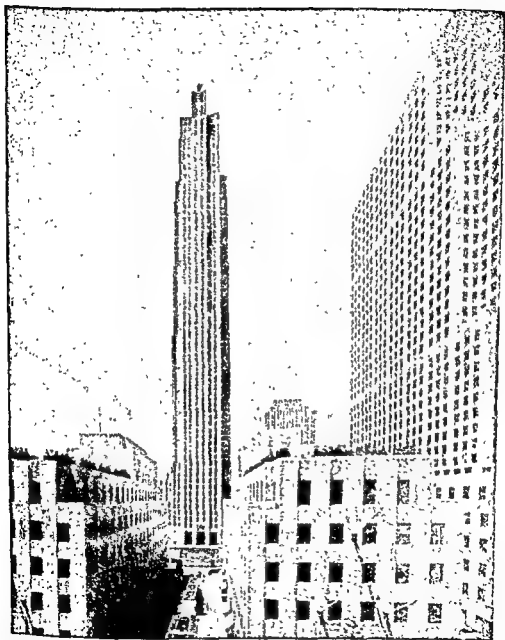
It is too soon to assert that a characteristic stylistic language has been created. Rather the old crafts of the manual age have been undermined, their style-marks (as in hand-carving or intricate modelling) rendered invalid as an expression of the age, and a way has been opened to a different decorative phraseology. It is not to be overlooked that already the skyscraper and the function-based house and the streamlined train, the automobile and the bathtub and the kitchen cabinet, the powder-compact and the electric lamp and the airplane, all have a like design character, in which long lines are guarded against breaking, surfaces are kept sheer, masses are manipulated for formal rhythms, and the sensuous values of materials are capitalized.

It is thus that styles are born. In this case the machine, symbol of the age, dictates the idioms. The art spirit is again active, is creating in the one place which would have seemed least likely to the materialist—and to the artist—of a generation ago: among the machines.

The oldest existing piece of human writing, it is said, inscribed on a clay tablet in a museum at Constantinople, begins with these words: 'Alas,



Beginnings of a new architecture buildings in Radio City New York Reinhard & Hofmeister Corbett Harrison & MacMurray and Hood & Foulhoux architects



Beginnings of a new architecture: buildings in Radio City, New York. Reinhard & Hofmeister, Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray, and Hood & Foulhoux, architects

things are not what they used to be!" One-half of mankind perpetually hangs its hopes and judgments—and its enjoyments—upon the past the best and ultimate things belong to the days gone beyond recall. But there are always a few men, artist-prophets, who look forward, who are inspired by what is and what can be, rather than by what has been. Through them there comes periodically a fresh creative release. Art blossoms in a new form. Because it is unlike the old, the conservative party damns it, and exclaims "Alas, things are not what they used to be!"

The historian is inevitably caught between the two parties. He usually writes as if progress had stopped. He must, nevertheless, if he claims to be of his own time, reassess the work of the ages. The safest point of view is that of thirty years back. In adopting one nearer his own study—and enjoyment—he opens the way to judgment by an experience too personal and a perspective too short. If that has happened here, the fault may be in part atoned for by the continual stress upon art as a growing changing thing. Men now see, as for many centuries they did not, that there are no final rules for either creation or judgment.

We seem today to be on the first courses of a creative slope, after an epochal revolutionary turn. There will be other turns other slopes. The best knowledge of history would seem to be that which affords greatest pleasure in all that has been created by the hands of artists up to the moment of recording without the erection of barriers against further release. Equipped with that knowledge, within that open-mindedness, one is prepared to partake freely of a joy that artists have been storing up through all man's time on earth and will further increase endlessly.



## *Appendix*

NOTE ON MAJOR EPOCHS OF ART HISTORY

CHART OF CONCURRENT ORIENTAL  
AND WESTERN DEVELOPMENTS

TABLE OF DATES OF OUTSTANDING  
EUROPEAN MONUMENTS AND MASTERS

A DESCRIPTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## Note on Major Epochs of Art History

Traditionally, the art history of Europe has been classified under five or six major headings:

*Prehistoric*

*Classic or Ancient (Greek and Roman)*

*Byzantine* (sometimes omitted, or treated as "Early Christian")

*Medieval* (including Romanesque and Gothic)

*Renaissance*

*Modern*

Without presuming to rearrange history or to change custom, one may note that recent researches, and shifts in appreciation, have made modifications necessary, particularly at the beginning and the end of this classification. A more convenient working division, for study purposes, might be found in the following table (as regards European art alone)

*Early or pre-Classic*

*Primitive*

*Aegean*

*Archaic Greek, and Etruscan*

*Classic* Greek from c. 480 B.C., and Roman

*Byzantine*

*Medieval*

*Renaissance*

*Post-Renaissance* Eclectic or literal period, c. 1630-c. 1880

*Modern* c. 1880-date

Two non-European cultures are usually treated in Western histories, but are given independent status. Egyptian art, extending from prehistoric times through the Aegean, archaic Greek, and Classic periods, disappearing in a fusion of native and Hellenistic Greek practice, about 300 B.C., and Mesopotamian art (including Sumerian, Babylonian, and Assyrian), extending from the dawn of history, about 4000 B.C., to the time of the Persian conquest of Babylonia, at about the opening of the Classic era in Greece.

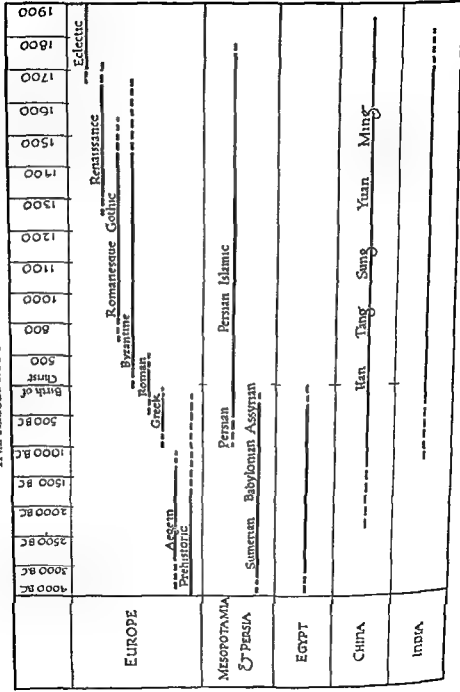
In the arrangement of European epochs in a chart to show relationship to these and Oriental manifestations, only the broadest divisions, with inexact boundaries, can be shown, but it is hoped that the following graph will serve to indicate, roughly, concurrent developments East and West, thus aiding in the understanding of world streams of creativeness.

## Table of Dates of Outstanding European Monuments and Masters

*Because dates of monuments and artists have been omitted in most cases from the text, in the interest of easy reading, a check-list, in chronological order, is here added. A comparatively small series of monuments has been chosen for inclusion up to the thirteenth century A.D. It is notable that only then did the name of the artist become a matter of prime importance, and the dates of his birth and death a matter of record. The list, in addition to its value for reference, emphasizes for the student the concurrent development of the several national schools after A.D. 1400.*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 2000-1450 B.C. Palaces at Cnossus, Crete                           | c. 800 Charlemagne's capital at Aix-la-Chapelle           |
| c. 1500 B.C. Mycenaean monuments                                   | 11th-12th century St Ambrogio, Milan                      |
| 6th century B.C. Greek archaic Apollos                             | 11th-12th century Pisa group                              |
| 6th-5th centuries B.C. Etruscan art                                | Late 11th and early 12th centuries                        |
| Late 6th century B.C. Execias and other master vase-painters       | Romanesque churches of Caen, Bayeux, etc.                 |
| Early 5th century B.C. Temple of Zeus Olympia                      | c. 1100 St Mark's, Venice                                 |
| Early 5th century B.C. Euphronius and masters of red-figured vases | c. 1100-1125 Romanesque sculpture, Vézelay, Moissac, etc. |
| Mid-5th century B.C. Parthenon A.C. of Pericles, Phidias           | 12th century Norman architecture in England               |
| Late 5th century B.C. Erechtheum                                   | 12th-13th centuries Chartres cathedral                    |
| 4th century B.C. Praxiteles  | 13th century High Gothic Amiens, Reims, Paris             |
| 323-146 B.C. Hellenistic era                                       | 13th-14th centuries Alhambra Moors in Spain               |
| Early 1st century A.D. Ara Pacis, Rome Augustan Age                | 14th-15th centuries English Gothic cathedrals             |
| 1st century A.D. Colosseum, Rome Pont du Gard                      | c. 1205-1278 Niccolò Pisano                               |
| 2nd century A.D. Pantheon  | c. 1240-1302 Cimabue                                      |
| 328 A.D. Constantinople founded                                    | 1255-c. 1319 Duccio                                       |
| 386 A.D. Basilica of St. Paul outside the Walls, Rome              | 1266-1336 Giotto  |
| c. 440 Tomb of Galla Placidia, Ravenna                             | 1284-1344 Simone Martini                                  |
| 532-537 Santa Sophia, Constantinople                               | 1308-1368 Orcagna   |
| Mid-6th century Ravenna, churches and mosaics                      | c. 1360-1428 Gentile da Fabriano                          |
| c. 8th century Celtic arts Ireland                                 | c. 1365-1426 Hubert van Eyck                              |
|  | 1371-1438 Jacopo della Quercia                            |
|  | 1377-1446 Brunelleschi                                    |
|  | 1378-1455 Ghiberti  |

TIME PERIODS NOT DRAWN TO SCALE



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|             |                                      |           |                    |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 1386-1466   | Donatello                            | 1577-1640 | Rubens             |
| 1387-1455   | Fra Angelico                         | 1580-1666 | Hals               |
| c 1390-1440 | Jan van Eyck                         | 1589-1652 | Rubens             |
| c 1395-1455 | Pisanello                            | 1593-1665 | Poussin            |
| 1397-1475   | Uccello                              | 1598-1680 | Bernini            |
| c 1400      | Culmination of Russian icon painting | 1599-1660 | Velazquez          |
| 1400-1482   | Luca della Robbia                    | 1599-1641 | Van Dyck           |
| 1400-1464   | Roger van der Weyden                 | 1600-1682 | Claude Lorrain     |
| 1401-1428   | Masaccio                             | 1606-1669 | Rembrandt          |
| 1406-1469   | Filippo Lippi                        | 1617-1681 | ter Borch          |
| 1416-1492   | Piero della Francesca                | 1618-1682 | Munillo            |
| 1420-1498   | Benozzo Gozzoli                      | 1628-1682 | Rusdael            |
| 1429-1507   | Gentile Bellini                      | 1629-1677 | de Hooch           |
| c 1430-1494 | Memling                              | 1632-1675 | Vermeer            |
| c 1430-1516 | Giovanni Bellini                     | 1684-1721 | Watteau            |
| 1431-1506   | Mantegna                             | 1696-1770 | Tiepolo            |
| 1435-1488   | Verrocchio                           | 1697-1768 | Canaletto          |
| c 1445-1491 | Schongauer                           | 1697-1764 | Hogarth            |
| 1446-1523   | Perugino                             | 1699-1779 | Chardin            |
| 1447-1510   | Botticelli                           | 1703-1770 | Boucher            |
| 1449-1494   | Ghirlandaio                          | 1723-1792 | Reynolds           |
| 1452-1519   | Leonardo da Vinci                    | 1727-1788 | Gainsborough       |
| c 1455-1522 | Carpaccio                            | 1732-1806 | Fragonard          |
| 1462-1521   | Piero di Cosimo                      | 1741-1828 | Houdon             |
| 1471-1528   | Durer                                | 1746-1828 | Goya               |
| 1472-1553   | Cranach                              | 1748-1825 | David              |
| 1475-1564   | Michelangelo                         | 1757-1827 | Blake              |
| c 1476-1545 | Baldung                              | 1763-1821 | Crome              |
| 1477-1576   | Titian                               | 1775-1851 | Turner             |
| 1478-1511   | Giorgione                            | 1776-1837 | Constable          |
| 1483-1520   | Raphael                              | 1780-1867 | Ingres             |
| 1485-1530   | Grunewald                            | 1791-1824 | Gericault          |
| 1486-1531   | Andrea del Sarto                     | 1796-1875 | Corot              |
| 1494-1534   | Correggio                            | 1798-1863 | Delacroix          |
| 1497-1543   | Holbein                              | 1808-1879 | Daumier            |
| 1500-1571   | Cellini                              | 1814-1875 | Millet             |
| 1518-1594   | Tintoretto                           | 1819-1877 | Courbet            |
| 1525-1569   | Brueghel                             | 1824-1898 | Puvis de Chavannes |
| 1525-1578   | Moroni                               | 1830-1903 | Pissarro           |
| 1528-1588   | Veronese                             | 1832-1883 | Manet              |
| c 1542-1614 | El Greco                             | 1834-1917 | Degas              |
| 1569-1608   | Caravaggio                           | 1834-1903 | Whistler           |
|             |                                      | 1839-1906 | Cézanne            |

# *Table of Dates*

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1840-1926 Monet  
1841-1919 Renoir  
1844-1910 Rousseau  
1845-1903 Gauguin

1851-1890 Van Gogh  
1856-1925 Sargent  
1859-1891 Seurat  
1881-1919 Lehmbruck



## A Descriptive Bibliography

It seems to this historian of art that there is nothing more forbidding than the long lists of book titles commonly encountered under the word "bibliography." They include works obviously various in purpose and in merit: books designed for scholars and books meant for beginners and laymen, all listed with equal prominence, with not a word to indicate special aims or comparative values.

Certainly, for the average reader, a selected list instead, with brief descriptions of the several works recommended, indicating the nature of each work's usefulness, would seem to be more serviceable. It has been the object here to pick, within each subdivision, the three or four books that will afford easiest approach to, and understanding of, that particular section of the history, and through which, usually, the reader will be guided to other and more specialized reading. Works in English alone have been included.

**GENERAL HISTORIES OF ART** The one comprehensive history to which an author brings gifts of his own, enlarging the meaning of the works written about, is *History of Art*, by Elie Faure, translated from the French by Walter Pach (5 vols., New York, 1921-1930). Useless as a fact book or reference text, it yet is the most valuable survey in the language, for its stimulus to the imagination and the illumination it casts over human and social phenomena in relation to art. Many readers will find it visionary and romantic, but it is the only extensive treatise by a man with understanding of modern art, who interprets and inspires as he describes. *History of Art*, by José Pijoan, translated from the Spanish by Ralph L. Roys (3 vols., New York, 1927-1928), is useful for opposite reasons, it is conventional and crammed with archaeological data and scholarly opinion. Though weak in the field of Oriental art, in other directions it brings a wealth of material, including more than 2600 illustrations. Also factual and unliterary, but very useful and in convenient compass, is *Art through the Ages*, by Helen Gardner (revised ed., New York, 1936). It is a handbook, designed on the "description of masterpieces" method, compressing thousands of names, titles, and dates, and nearly 900 illustrations, into a single volume. Excellent on several scores, and beautifully illustrated, but making every judgment from the nineteenth-century rather than the modern point of view, is *A History of Art*, by H. B. Cotterill (2 vols., New York, 1923-1924). Of histories treating parts of the art story comprehensively, most useful is *Art in the Western World*, by David M. Robb and J. J. Garrison (New York and London, 1935), a textbook, well documented and conventional, but revealing a sincere attempt to understand modern art.

**GENERAL HISTORIES OF ARCHITECTURE.** The most useful is *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*, by Sir Banister Fletcher (9th revised ed., London, 1931), for the immense amount of information contained and the 4000 illustrations. Excellent too is the briefer but generously illustrated work, *A Short Critical History of Architecture*, by H. Heathcote Statham (2nd revised ed., London and New York, 1927). *A History of Architecture*, by Fiske Kimball and G. H. Edgell (New York and London, 1918), is a satisfactory, simply written textbook. All these are works of history as seen in the eclectic era. A stimulating rewriting of history from the modern point of view, not pretending to completeness—perhaps even biased, but still stimulating—is *Rameses to Rockefeller: The Story of Architecture*, by Charles Harris Whitaker (New York, 1934).

**HISTORIES OF PAINTING.** The most notable are those dealing with special phases or single epochs (to be listed under specific headings), although one can recommend highly, as regards the European story, *The Painter in History*, by Ernest L. Short (London, 1929). It is readable, sound, and not too far from the modern way of judgment. There are also these three works valuable for very different reasons. *The Art in Painting*, by Albert C. Barnes (3rd revised ed., New York, 1937), which includes an historical review, with regard to the one matter of achieved "plastic form"; *Great Painters in Relation to the European Tradition*, by Edith R. Abbot (New York, 1927), a conventional survey of the art in Europe from the Western beginnings to the twentieth century, interesting rather than inspired, and *The Outline of Art*, edited by Sir William Orpen (2 vols., London and New York, 1923-1924), covering painting from the time of Giotto to the World War, and excellent in parts but very, very old-fashioned in others.

**SCULPTURE.** There is the wholly uninspired but thorough work, *A History of Sculpture*, by G. H. Chase and C. R. Post (New York and London, 1925). It is anti-modern and it barely attempts an understanding of Oriental manifestations, but it is the outstanding complete and documented review, sufficiently illustrated.

**PRIMITIVE ART.** As introduction perhaps the most satisfactory single volume is *Primitive Art*, by Franz Boas (Oslo, 1927), if only because the author recognizes formal values as the test of significance. Dated but still interesting is *The Beginnings of Art*, by Ernst Grosse (New York, 1898). For art in relation to background there is most notably *Men of the Old Stone Age: Their Environment, Life and Art*, by Henry Fairfield Osborn (3rd revised ed., New York, 1930). Dealing directly with the cave drawings and paintings are *The Art of the Cave Dweller*, by G. Baldwin Brown (London, 1928) and *Prehistoric Rock Pictures in Europe and Africa*, by Leo Frobenius and Douglas C. Fox (New York, 1937), an account of recent exploration and researches published in connexion with an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. The origins of art are discussed in stimulating fashion in *Art and Society*, by Herbert Read (New York, 1937).

MESOPOTAMIAN ART is nowhere comprehensively described, but there are excellent treatises on several divisions of the subject. Outstanding is *The Development of Sumerian Art*, by C. Leonard Woolley (New York, 1935), supplemented by the briefer *The Sumerians*, by the same author (Oxford, 1928). Of later developments there is a very short survey, generously illustrated, in *Babylonian Art*, by Simon Harcourt-Smith (London, 1928). The sculptures are thoroughly treated in *The Stones of Assyria*, by C. J. Gadd (London, 1936). To be recommended also is *The Civilizations of the East: The Near and Middle East*, by René Grousset (New York, 1931).

EGYPTIAN ART is given modern interpretation in the finely illustrated work, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*, with introductory text by Hermann Ranke (Vienna, 1936). There is also the less notably modern but valuable study, *The Art of Egypt through the Ages*, edited by Sir E. Denison Ross (London, 1931), likewise an attractive "picture book." Of older texts, three are still outstandingly useful: *Egyptian Art*, by Jean Capart (London, 1923); *Art in Egypt*, by G. Maspero (New York, 1930); and *A History of Egypt from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest*, by James Henry Breasted (New York, 1912). The story is told in pictures in *Ancient Egyptian Works of Art*, by Arthur Weigall (Boston, n.d.). Most readable of all books on the subject, though far from being a true history, is *Pyramid and Temple*, by Julius Meier-Graef, translated by Roger Hinks (New York, 1930).

ÆGEAN CULTURE is best approached through chapters dealing with the subject in larger histories of art, but every student should know of, and perhaps browse in, Sir Arthur Evans's unwieldy report on his discoveries in Crete, *The Palace of Minos* (4 vols., London, 1921-1935), and the several accounts of the excavations by Schliemann at Mycenæ and of Tsountas at Vaphio and elsewhere.

GREEN ART. The writings are still so uncritical, so devoted to the classical-realistic ideal, that one may as well go all the way back to the actual Greek-works, say, to the scholarly and complete work, *The Art of the Greeks*, by H. B. Walters (revised ed., New York, 1922), and *The Principles of Greek Art*, by Percy Gardner (London, 1914). Useful as introduction is *The Art of Greece*, by E. A. Gardner (London, 1925). On vase painting there is the excellent and well-illustrated *Greek Vase-Painting*, by Ernst Buschor (New York, n.d.). There is a translation also of *Masterpieces of Greek Drawing and Painting*, by Ernst Pfuhl (New York, 1926), a work general in scope but scholarly and including many fine plates. For a popular, romantic introduction to Greek culture one should read *The Glory That Was Greece*, by J. C. Stobart (3rd revised ed., New York, 1935). An exhaustive scholarly work is *The Sculpture and Sculptors of the Greeks*, by Gisela M. A. Richter (New Haven, 1929).

ROMAN ART is best approached (for the conventional view and easy reading) through *The Grandeur That Was Rome*, by J. C. Stobart (3rd revised ed., London,

1934), for the historical background, and *The Art of the Romans*, by H. B. Walters (London, 1911), for facts about, and generous illustrations of, the arts. A book not directly about the arts but by an historian with an eye trained for formal values is *A History of the Ancient World Vol II, Rome*, by M. Rostovtzeff (corrected ed., Oxford, 1928). *Art in Ancient Rome*, by Eugénie Strong (2 vols., New York, 1928) is an eminently useful and carefully detailed guide, with nearly 600 thumbnail illustrations.

**ORIENTAL ART** The most pleasurable introduction for Western seekers is through books not specifically historical. Among the best for the purpose are *The Spirit of Man in Asian Art*, by Laurence Binyon (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1936). *The Flight of the Dragon*, by Laurence Binyon (London, 1927), and the early chapters of *Form and Colour*, by Lisle March Phillipps (New York, 1915). A useful compilation, not uniformly excellent, but with brief surveys by authorities including Osvald Siren, Laurence Binyon, Jiro Harada, and Carl W. Bishop, is *The Romance of Chinese Art* (Garden City, 1936), which brings together the articles written on this subject for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. An excellent introductory survey correlating art development and general history is Arnold Silcock's *Introduction to Chinese Art and History* (revised ed., London, 1936). In an appendix is a table showing concurrent events in Eastern and Western history. Very readable, and well illustrated is *China Magnificent*, by Dagny Carter (New York, 1935). A second compilation, with a high standard of both scholarship and literary presentation, and generously illustrated is *Chinese Art: An Introductory Handbook to Painting, Sculpture, Ceramics, Textiles, Bronzes and Minor Arts*, by Roger Fry and others (London, 1935). On the Scythian small sculpture there is the excellent book, *Scythian Art*, by Gregory Borovka (New York, 1928).

**HINDU ART** The standard works are the scholarly treatises by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, most notably *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (New York, 1927). A straightforward account can be found in *The Civilizations of the East India*, by René Grousset (New York, 1931). For introduction, the student may safely be referred to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

**BYZANTINE ART** Here one can recommend *Byzantine Art*, by David Talbot Rice (Oxford, 1935), as outstanding. It is an authoritative, excellently written treatise. It may be used for pleasurable reading or as a gateway to the other material on the subject. Two specialized books may be mentioned because easily overlooked. *Origin of Christian Church Art*, by Josef Strzygowski (Oxford, 1923), and *The Birth of Western Painting*, by Robert Byron and David Talbot Rice (New York, 1931). Two excellent books on icons are *The Russian Icon*, by Nikodim Pavlovich Kondakov (Oxford, 1927), and *Masterpieces of Russian Painting*, a compilation edited by Michael Farberman (London, n.d.).

PERSIAN ART is popularly treated in *An Introduction to Persian Art since the Seventh Century A.D.*, by Arthur Upham Pope (New York, 1931), a sufficiently illustrated, readable survey. The subject is well treated and illustrated in *The Civilizations of the East: The Near and Middle East*, by René Grousset (New York, 1931).

MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN ART, Romanesque and Gothic, is not adequately treated and illustrated in any single book, although the second volume of Faure's *History of Art* includes a meaty introduction to it, and Pijoan presents rich materials in scattered chapters. The best speculative essay is, perhaps, *Form in Gothic*, by Wilhelm Worringer, translated by Herbert Read (London, 1927). The spirit of the era is beautifully conveyed in *Cathedral: A Gothic Pilgrimage*, by Helen Huss Parkhurst (Boston, 1936), in *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres*, by Henry Adams (Boston and New York, 1930), and in *The Substance of Gothic*, by Ralph Adams Cram (Boston, 1925). There is a wealth of detail and curious lore in *Arts and Crafts in the Middle Ages*, by Julia de Wolf Addison (New York, 1908). Romanesque and Gothic sculpture is best studied in the extensive text and rich illustrations of *Medieval Sculpture in France*, by Arthur Gardner (New York and Cambridge, 1931).

THE SPANISH CONTRIBUTION is acceptably summarized in *Spanish Art*, a compilation by ten authorities, which appeared as *Burlington Magazine Monograph II* (New York, 1927). It is richly illustrated and it includes an extensive bibliography. The treatment of Spanish art is exceptionally full and detailed in Pijoan's *History of Art*. The most useful and readable of the older treatises is *The Story of Spanish Painting*, by Charles H. Caffin (New York, 1910). The student who desires to go further should consult publications of the Hispanic Society of America.

FLEMISH ART is briefly treated, with scholarly knowledge but in popular style, in *Flemish Art: A Critical Survey*, by Roger Fry (New York, 1927). A detailed guide with many thumbnail illustrations is found in *Art in Flanders*, by Max Rooses (New York, 1931). Midway between these two works lies *Flemish Painting before the 18th Century*, by Paul Lambotte (London, 1927).

ITALIAN ART has an immense library of its own, and the student may best find guidance to it through a simple running account such as *A History of Italian Painting*, by Frank Jewett Mather, Jr. (New York, 1935). It is at once scholarly and readable, and it will lead back to the standard larger histories. The student intent upon pleasurable reading should not overlook two excellent older works: *Renaissance in Italy: The Fine Arts*, by John Addington Symonds (New York, 1908), and *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, by Jakob Burckhardt (London, 1929). For a colourful re-creation of the life of the times one should read *Leonardo the Florentine*, by Rachel Annand Taylor (New York and London, 1930). As regards the romantic movement that began in Italy at the close of the Renaissance, there is an admirable popular treatise, *Bandits in a Landscape*, by W. Gaunt (London and New York, 1937).

nchly illustrated, picks up the story in the eighteenth century, but is essentially a review of nineteenth-century achievement. It is very illuminating as to Victorian ideals. Sufficiently up-to-date to serve a good purpose still is *Modern Painting: A Study of Tendencies*, by Frank Jewett Mather, Jr. (New York, 1927). Most of the books recommended in connexion with French art—notably those of Fry, Bell, and Wilenski—treat illuminatingly of the nineteenth-century advance. The American story begins in this period, the best account, because comprehensive and accurate yet discriminating, is *Art in America: A Complete Survey*, edited by Holger Cahill and Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (New York, 1935). It is richly illustrated.

LATER CHINESE ART is treated in practically all the books described under the heading ORIENTAL ART, above. It remains to mention that the *Handbook of Japanese Art*, by Nontake Tsuda (Tokyo, 1935), is an exceptionally meaty guide. It is conveniently arranged, up-to-date, and well illustrated—though very matter-of-fact as compared with the many literary and rhapsodical appreciations. There are two good introductory works dealing with Negro art: *African Negro Art*, edited by James Johnson Sweeney (New York, 1935), and *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, by Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro (New York, 1926). For pre-Columbian American art, the standard volumes are *A Study of Maya Art*, by H. J. Spinden (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1913) and *Ancient Civilizations of the Andes*, by Philip Ainsworth Means (New York and London, 1931).

TWENTIETH-CENTURY ART. The books in this field are likely to be controversial and limited, and no single work can be recommended as paving the way to understanding and appreciation of "the new art." But the following are serviceable, even excellent, in various ways: *Modern French Painters*, by Maurice Raynal (New York, 1928), *Art Now*, by Herbert Read (New York, 1933), and the *Modern Art* volume of Elie Faure's *History*. To these the present writer is impelled to add his own *A Primer of Modern Art* (New York, 1932) if only because it is said to have given numerous students new eyes in regard to "modernist" works. More specialized but not to be overlooked, are the excellent treatises issued by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in connexion with its exhibitions. They form the most nearly complete and the most accessible row of books on living art.

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